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By

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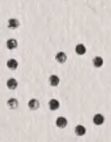
The Threshold of Nirvana



BALTIMORE

SAULSBURY PUBLISHING COMPANY

1918

PZ 3
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APR -9 1918

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no. 1.

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CHAPTER I.

A great forest of cypress gloomed against the skyline to the south, cut along its northern edge by a little creek on its way to the broad current of the lower Mississippi. Far up the gentle slope to the north and facing the jutting bluffs of a small promontory stood Belleroche, massive and square; the dull red of its masonry visible here and there through the dense foliage, embowering colonnaded porch and lofty galleries.

A yellow haze brooded over the vast reaches of river and vale. It was a scene of early autumn languishing in late summer's drought. The giant live oaks on the lawn betrayed sallowness in the crisping edges of their leaves, and the coarse grass underfoot was like tinder. No sign of life stirred within the broad, open hall. A sleepy negro lounged at the steps in waiting for a chance visitor. A latticed summer house, over grown with vines, looked inviting and had evidently been found so, as there was a flash of color visible among the vines, and on nearer approach the murmur of voices.

On a rustic seat within, half reclined a young man gazing indolently at the gipsy girl beside him, with head bent over the white, delicate hand passive in the grasp of her own dirty brown fingers. Silently the beady eyes scanned the smooth

palm with its faint tracery of lines; caressingly a black-bordered nail tapped each gentle "mound" so notable in palmistry. The subject was growing impatient, however.

"Come, come! Why do you not say something. You act as if afraid. Is my fortune as ugly as my face?"

"No, senor; never ugly. You have the noble looks and your hand is gentle. But the life line is crossed and the love line wanders. Mother of Saints! I looked for the one to heal the other! Ah, what am I saying! Let the gipsy look again; we may find a fairer fate."

But the young man had risen, and was waving her aside.

"That is enough. I gave you the piece of silver. The next fortune teller will have a different story, I hope."

"Have pity, senor, you mock me. Let me try again—pray, pray"—and the red-skirted figure fell on one knee, clasping the man's wrists and endeavoring to turn his palms upward. Playfully clenching his fingers, he smiled down at her eager efforts.

Simultaneously with a quick tread on the gravel outside was heard a voice of authority.

"Philip, I have come personally to remind you of the propriety that seems to have deserted you for a moment. We have visitors and if one of the servants reports this escapade, your mother

will have one more occasion for grief. Your lack of courtesy, Philip—"

The speaker was tall and dignified, clad in well worn broadcloth and immaculate linen, a typical southern gentlemen of the seventies.

"I beg your pardon, father; I did not know mother expected me in the drawing room. I had the afternoon to myself and—"

"To yourself! Upon my word, sir. Because you have the time, you must admit gipsy fortune tellers to the grounds, and I find you thus. Girl! begone instantly! I will have no trespassing from your kind. If you dare be seen here again Sam will set the dogs on you."

The gipsy had lingered with the effrontery of her race, until the final sentence turned her smiles to terror. Whimpering, she slunk aside, and once outside the arbor ran down the path like a deer.

"Philip, your lapses of late have been serious. We gentlefolk, despoiled as we are, have our hereditary dignity to sustain. My humiliation at the sight of your consorting with that low creature is extreme. We did not know where to find you, so excuses were made to the visitors and they no longer expect you. Were you in the least thoughtful of your mother, you might assist her in receiving and entertaining guests."

"Father, father!" The clear-cut features were high and sharp with indignity, the dark eyes glowing. "I beg you allow me a word. These

poor wanderers should evoke pity rather than scorn. As a southern gentleman I protest against setting dogs on a woman."

"And I command you to abjure the company of these strollers and such outcasts. The whole thieving cavalcade moves on tomorrow, I am glad to know. That camp on the river has been a demoralizing influence."

"Not necessarily. The young folk go at night to see the gipsy dances—the Spanish fandango and *El Son*. Some of these are said to be the very poetry of motion. Knowing your prejudices, I have remained away, and I humbly beg pardon for what has happened this afternoon. We young men oft fall into follies."

"Follies! With our fair Southland sapped of its sustenance, its sinews cut, one would think we had done forever with follies."

"Who were the guests this afternoon, father?"

"When I tell you, perhaps you may understand why your dereliction mortifies us so. Madame Chartrain and her daughters. It is time you went courting, and your mother has made a wise choice in Isabelle Chartrain. The girl is modest, pure as a lily, with a heart of gold."

"She makes me think of one, too, in her swaying grace of movement and that waxen complexion. But father, wait until I grow out of my hobble-de-hoy ways."

"Sir, you put me out of all patience! Haven't I told you this roystering must stop. This phil-

andering with gipsies has decided the question. In the old days such an offense might have been condoned; the new regime calls for a loftier pose. I leave you to ponder that."

Watching the stately form of Major Carewe down the path through the oleanders and hydrangeas, the eyes of this undutiful son grew langourous again, reflecting the smile of his mobile lips. By Jove, that's the best text I've ever given him! Holy pride of race and name! To think of the Madame and demoiselles calling in state while the destined *parti* was amusing himself with a gipsy fortune teller! Poor old dear of a pater, though, too mortified to send one of the gossiping negroes, coming in person, thankful every step that this arbor stands in such seclusion, at the end of a veritable labyrinth. Otherwise we might have been descried from the veranda.

How lucky to be able to tell him I have not yet visited the camp. He need never know whether I keep my promise to the girl tonight or not. Whence all this puritanical prejudice, anyway? Father isn't fifty yet, but he is for renunciation in the absolute. Time was when we saw these very gipsies dancing under the oaks and their elfin children scrambling for pennies. I shall take the opportunity of seeing the Spanish dances once more after having made peace with mother, who, saintly soul, is seldom difficult."

However, Mrs. Carewe was inclined to be difficult this evening when her son essayed propitia-

tion. Her fragile form was erect in the great arm chair and the red of petulance glowed on either thin cheek.

"Philip, I had hoped you might respect my wishes in regard to hospitality. When I have no one to assist me in receiving guests and you are nowhere to be found, the effort is too great for my invalidism. As a young lad you were my dependence and it has been my joy and comfort to invite visitors with the expectation of meeting you."

"Callers do not miss me now, *chere maman.* Because the little lad resembled his mother they fancied his looks. Ladies do not care for a tall, reedy spindling—" But the thin little maternal hand was held up for silence. "No badinage now, Philip, please. Madame Chartrain was visibly annoyed and Isabelle, too."

"I venture neither looked half so pretty in her anger as you do now. Let me kiss away that line between your brows, *chere petite maman,* and then forgive your naughty son, ingrate though he is and breaker of the whole social decalogue."

CHAPTER II.

The last gleam of sunset had faded from the pale sky of twilight. Thick masses of river fog were rolling in through the weird ranks of cypress sentinels along the low bluffs fending Belleroche from rapine of turbid waters. The plantation had taken its name from that of an islet boldly facing the promontory. Craggy towers of red and yellow sandstone crowned its saucy head, while boulders of purple, slate and brown lay heaped at their base. A moment since all had shone like a jewel against the muddy water, but the youth walking under the trees had not seen it. He watched some flame-like glimmerings far down the bank. As twilight deepened the ruddy light of a campfire in the forest pierced the gloom like the ray of a beckoning star.

In response to some far-away call of venturesome blood, Philip Carewe descended the slope, crossed the little bridge and set out for the lowlands bordering on the vast marshes to southward.

The gipsy camp was on a knoll where the higher ground afforded a sparse growth of magnolias and live oaks, instead of the dense cypresses and willows of the swamp. The fire which had served for cooking supper was now a huge ember heap and in the glow could be seen the circling forms of dancers—men in short trousers, girls in striped skirts with scarfs about their shoulders. Typi-

cal Don Juans, fierce in bristling mustachios, strummed on guitar and mandolin. Older folk were huddled in the background seated on inverted baskets. The scampering children threw brush wood on the fire, arousing a fitful glare.

From somewhere in the shadows a form came to meet the visitor. He recognized her instantly, tall, sylph like, swaying in unison with the trees in the night wind. "Buenos noches, Senor, the Spanish girl does not forget."

"Good evening, my Amaryllis. I shall keep my intention of calling you Amaryllis, no matter what your name may be. Will you teach me the dance?"

"We are all dying to teach you. Here is Lolita, and there Mona."

"I want you—first at least. The reboso?"

"Here, I have this one—the scarlet with silver fringe. Hold the corners with the finger tips, so. Your senora takes the other end like this. Move the feet this way; next, whirl on the toes. The music, the music! Play, Rodriguez! Play, Carlos!"

The other dancers stopped to watch the strange couple. The young dandy in the regular evening attire of the period, the girl with long braids flying from shoulders clad in coarse cotton. Back and forth they swayed in unison, holding the long scarf high above their heads, now winding it about each whirling form in turn.

An old crone crouching against a tree somewhat apart, gave a shriek of alarm and rushed toward the dancers. "Stop, stop. Something—*el diablo,* crashing and crackling."

The musicians let fall their instruments. Philip and his partner, shocked out of their gay abandon, stood still, confronted by a monster that appeared half man and half beast, until the firelight gave it the outlines of a mule-mounted negro. The darky pulled off his tattered hat, revealing a crown of snowy wool, and with it belabored his refractory steed. "Get along, Jinny, ef yo' ol' haid aint al'ays on de wrong end. Marse Philip, I axes yo' pahdon, suh, cyant get dish yer mewl no closah."

"Very well, Nathaniel. I understand and am right at your side," and the young man had cleared the intervening space at a bound. "What brings you?"

"Ol' Marse rarin' an' de missus, yo' ma, mighty sick. Majah don' know whah you is, but Suse Em'ly, my gal, done seed you cross de bridge. I t'ink dat Suse been walkin' wid dat yaller Dolphus and she gwine get a raw hidin'."

"Oh Nathaniel! Mother sick! She was well this afternoon."

"Dunno 'bout dat. Miss Adelaide mighty white all day an' don' eat nothin', Mammy Luce say."

"I'll be at her side as soon as the Lord gives me strength to get there."

When Philip Carewe entered his mother's room

that night, the eyes of all present might have burned into his flesh, but he heeded naught except the still form in the great white bed. On his knees he sought the delicate loved hand and covered it with tearful kisses. Oh, joy; it was warm! A moment later its mate was laid on his head.

"Mother, mother! I was so frightened. Are you better now?"

"Yes, dear; much better since you are safe. They said you had gone for a walk and toward the lowlands, and I remembered the dangers of those places. Since the war nothing is safe. You might have been robbed and murdered — the swamp has swallowed up many a human life. And you are wearing your watch fob and seal ring. I am glad you left your scarf pin at home— the one you wore at dinner this evening."

"*Ma chere petite maman!* I'm all right. You must not get nervous over a big, careless fellow like me. There is no danger. I went walking among the cypresses—they look so queer at night.

"Now the good doctor's medicine will give you sleep, and tomorrow we shall plan a drive to Fleur-de-Lis."

"Good night, Phillie. You are so dear—all I have."

His diamond pin! As the candles of his dressing table revealed a disheveled white tie, a sickening sense of shame consumed Philip Carewe. Amaryllis turned pickpocket! What sort of a

dupe had he become to fall in with low thieves? And now what duplicity must be practiced to keep the dread knowledge from his mother, the frail little mother who had hysterics over every unaccountable absence, whose fancy conjured up images of terror every time her son left her armchair.

When merciless memory presented her taking the tiny diamond form her own brooch and having it reset for her son's own birthday gife, flames of self contempt shriveled his very soul.

CHAPTER III.

The sultriness of the night increased. With the dawn came a downpour of rain. The great storm sweeping the valley had already spent its main force; but a rapid rise of the river was imminent as a result of the northerly tempests.

Mammy Luce reported her mistress as refreshed with her few hours' sleep. Major Carewe forbore comment on the events of the previous night, a reticence that humiliated Philip more than any homily could have done. Both father and son felt the constraint of altered relations; recognized by the elder man as betokening the alien spirit of youth in new times.

Since the command "cease firing," seven years before, reconstruction had evoked all latency of power in the Louisiana planter. He had been obliged to face a mounting wave of dissolution with whatever of resource was left. Broken levees, grass-grown cotton fields, silent sugar mills, all proclaimed the passing of lash-drawn toil.

Strife and stress had wrought in Major Carewe the change from easy elegance to a stern, even brusque, manner. English puritanism, dormant for centuries, awaits but the call of adversity to rise, girt for the fray. The tension of heart strings, so responsive to Cromwellism, now tautened brain and nerve fiber to meet the exigencies

of defeat and loss. Floating and derelict as the labor of the freed slave must be, judicial management of a captious crew had redeemed some of the Carewe lands from the decay of neglect. To leave his son's patrimony intact was impossible, yet the owner of Belleroche hoped to clear the entire peninsula formed by river and creek of indebtedness. On the lowlands along the mile of river front cotton crops were assured, barring damages from inundation. Spring floods were comparatively harmless to the young plants, but in autumn the action of water was fatal to the maturing bolls. The sugar mills of the plantation had been partially destroyed by the negroes in their first burst of freedom, so the cultivation of cane was impracticable at present.

Problems manifold were clamoring for solution in Major Carewe's brain as he sat over his letters and accounts in the library that rainy morning. Philip's delinquencies were in abeyance; also the nervous attack of Mrs. Carewe, as a temperamental ebullition. Chivalry had been in Major Carewe the utmost indulgence of feminine caprice, though he had no mind to see his son a perpetual chevalier of flower and fan. The defection of the evening before had not drawn special remark from a man so long accustomed to the terrors of a delicate, ailing woman. Philip, however, had been badly shaken, and fancied the paternal state of mind as that of extreme displeasure. Now, with what composure he could

command, he offered his services in disposing of the accumulation of work on his father's desk. Why had he been so tardy in any attempt to relieve those burdened shoulders?

By the magic of kindred occupation the ugly barriers of discord melted away and the two became quite happy together in an hour.

"What a deluge of rain," remarked Philip, rising to shelve a large ledger. "And if it grows darker, shall I ring for candles, father?"

"No, thank you. This is all until after luncheon. I must go to your mother now. She is no doubt lonely."

"Yes, sir; and I had hoped to take her to drive soon. We planned to call on the Chartrains at Fleur-de-lis.

The smile lifting the corners of the stern mustache undermined the culprit's last stone of self-possession.

"Ah, indeed; that will please her, to have you beside her in the coach. The Chartrain ladies are delightful company. Your poor mother entertained them and many others in the old days. We must manage a few weeks for her in New Orleans this winter. Her old friends and acquaintances there would plan the gayeties she likes. Dr. Lanfranc says her nerves will be better for all the amusement we can give her. Would I could atone for the havoc of war on her happiness. During those four dreadful years she was haunted with visions of negro insurrection and my

bleeding corpse on the battlefield. How could I leave her? For nothing less than the call of the Southland, which was to me the call of God. And she sent me, too, bade me face the Yankee guns for her sake, buckling my sword-belt with her dainty fingers, holding you, my lad, within the circle of her arms."

"And I a youngster of nine or ten. Well I remember her calm face amid the wailing negroes who knew nothing more than 'Marse gwine ter de wah.'"

"The rain increases. I fear we shall not drive for many days. The morning paper states that the river is rising rapidly."

"In that case these creeks"—and Philip was at the window. I see the water is already submerging the willows and flooding the lowlands."

He stopped short, for his father was beside him scanning the scene with eyes alert for calamity.

But there was something of interest nearer; a flash of color amid the trees, a red garment of some kind, a kerchief waving perhaps, or a scarf.

"What is that?" almost shouted the irate Major. "Another of those damned gipsies! Signalling to some of her clan, I suppose, the brazen huzzy. Some pilfering scheme for the stables and poultry yard. Nat and Joab are likely asleep this rainy day." Then, at sight of a woolly head in the doorway, "Come, Marigold, what is it? Don't stand there grinning."

"Please suh, de missus done say, is you gwine come?"

"Certainly, and now Phil not a word of this imminent danger. Let us be at our liveliest for her sake."

However, Mrs. Carewe's acute senses had divined the menace although she maintained the pose of decorum through the ceremonious dinner hour. Later in the little family parlor Philip sang all her favorite Chansons du Provence accompanying himself softly on the old piano, and read from Madame Sevigne. Meanwhile the tempest outside increased in violence until the dash of wind driven torrents against the shutters could no longer be ignored.

"There will be a flood," whimpered the frightened invalid, nervously clutching her silken shawl with both hands. "Oh, Rodney, will the river destroy us? I can hear its hungry roar above the wind and rain. What shall we do?"

"My dear, we can do nothing. There is no danger to us on the promontory. Water has never reached the grounds of Belleroche. Our guardian cypresses have withstood the storms of ages. The creek has probably overspread its valley ere this. When the current sets in through the marshes to southward the danger to the crops will be lessened.

"Mammy Luce was praying this afternoon for some poor negroes on the islands in the marshes. She says the half-breed Indians who bring us

fish, turtles and game live there, and so many *many* wandering folk of all kinds who find a living somehow. Rodney, do you think they can escape drowning, poor, *poor* creatures?"

"Tut, tut, Adelaide! Your tender heart finds so much occasion for grief. These strays are expert in guarding their own precious skins. All swimmers, divers and canoeists."

"Well, if you are *sure*, Rodney. Philip just one more song, a hymn this time. Ora Pro Nobis."

CHAPTER IV.

Only the highest points of the gorgeous rocks of Bellroche Isle rose out the morning mists to greet the sun. Raging the brown current, debris strewn rushed past the old cypresses, now and then sending a breaker against their guarded trunks to dash in foam over their tops. The peninsula where creek and river met was a surging sea of driftwood and wreckage spreading far up the valley and over the forest hidden swamps to the south.

Philip Carewe—looking from the veranda tried to reall the location of the waving scarf of the preceding day. It must have been from the foot bridge, probably just before the waters carried the frail structure away.

Amaryllis! Faugh, how he hated himself!

A southern gentleman investing such a creature with romance! They were all a lying, thieving lot as her father had said. Yet, why was the girl trying to signal him? Did she imagine him such a dupe as to return for it? Perchance the gipsies would protest ignorance of his loss and for a consideration "conjure" its recovery. The true import of the frantic beckoning must remain a mystery. Had it not been for the paternal eye he might have ventured; but—filial obligation exists in the most degenerate age, and he must go to his mother.

He found her propped against pillows, wan with sleepless bodings of ruin for Belleroche. At the bedside her loyal husband soothed her with light estimates of the probable loss.

"The outlook is brighter now, Adelaide, the current setting in toward the marshes. Their overflow has gained momentum enough to carry to the lake and river. As the river subsides the little creek will draw away this sea that engulfs our fields; and cotton will survive a submergence if not too long. Even so we are not bankrupt."

"Aren't we really, Rodney? I dream sometimes of Belleroche in the hands of Yankees,—of one like that northern man we had to entertain at dinner when the tract of forest land was sold. His talk was all of investments, *investments, paying* investments. He seemed to be appraising everything he saw; the old mahogany tables, the family silver; and I think he was afraid of breaking my china from the way he clutched his coffee cup. Dear old Cassius was grinning all the while he served the table and I heard a positive guffaw from the kitchen which I forbore to reprimand."

"That is all a matter of difference in breeding, Adelaide. Captain Benham is a Yankee steamboat captain, a worthy man in his station. His rise from a deck-hand is a racy story. What could he know of the amenities of life? He paid an honest price for the land and intends rafting the timber to New Orleans. I had no facilities for marketing the lumber."

"But you are weary, dearest, and we must leave you to Mammy Luce who is casting threats with every wig wag of that faithful turban—eh, Philip."

"Not so weary, Rodney; only haunted by the vision of some vandal desecrating our home. For the few years that remain I crave its shelter and peace for me and mine."

CHAPTER V.

Alas, the "few years" were but a few months for Adelaide Carewe. Whether she could read the disaster, clouding the minds of all at Belleroche through their mask of cheerfulness, none could tell.

The tense bond of things so long loved seemed to have snapped. Though the dreaded revelation was never claimed from husband or son; both tacitly conceded her knowledge of the truth. She knew it and yielded to it.

"Neurasthenia has this characteristic," stated Dr. Lanfrane. "A fright, a shock leaves the patient calm but with lowered vitality. I fear that in Mrs. Carewe's case it is the ebbing of the tide. A miraculous keenness of apprehension is often manifested in these later stages. She has divined the loss of her home ,and stunned by the blow, her senses respond but slightly to outward stimuli. Sad, sad—yet 'tis merciful."

Major Carewe's high features sharpened with grief and his voice shook as he thanked his kind old friend for this frank statement.

"I feared so. She has had many nervous attacks of late. Philip, thoughtless fellow, gave her such a fright by his absence that evening. This ought to make a man of him. He is in his mother's room singing for her now. Rarely she asks for music, but when she does it must be the old

French ballads to the guitar. I am so glad Philip gratified her in learning to play." Both listened a moment in silence to the soft strumming well attuned to the rich tenor voice.

"What shall a knight do for his lady?
Why, love her, love her, love her, pardee."

"My son is as yet unawakened to the needs of the times. I think the loss of our cotton crop will bring him to his senses."

"Enough to perceive a pretty girl's interest. Last Sunday at church I observed Isabelle Chartrain when Philip took his place in your pew, not directly in front of the Chartrain's, but across the aisle. He spoke to her in the porch after service and they came down the steps together. I trust the lad is more susceptible than he seems. Appears to be walking in a dream."

"With our fortunes falling every day, we can offer no luxuries—still—" But the doctor interposed with a gesture of negation.

"Never disquiet yourself, the Chartrains are not bidding for wealth. Isabelle and Louise have each a legacy from France. An uncle who never married left it in trust for the girls at their majority and Isabelle is almost eighteen. A wily old family doctor knows when to speak and when to keep silent, and Phil must be enlightened. Tell him to stop in and see me tomorrow on his way to Fleur de Lis."

Meantime in the sick room the music had ceased. The singer sat watching the half closed eyes

and gentle smile on the wan face on the pillow. "She is resting peacefully," he thought and essayed to steal away from the room unnoticed when her voice feebly sharp arrested him.

"My son!"

"Yes, mother; I was leaving to rest and sleep."

"Come here; let me look into your eyes and ask whether you are in love. Ah, no need of answer. There is something akin to love beneath those down-dropped lids. You do not know whether you love Isabelle or not; but O, Phil, there is some wild fancy there. My dear, my dear, it is not the sensible attachment we long to see. My son, you must curb wild rovings. Promise me to try to love the dear girl who is waiting to be won. Her gentle heart is breaking. Promise me, Phil."

"There kneeling at his mother's side, her brimming eyes fixed on his face, her wasted hands clasping his arm, Philip Carewe saw two faces rise from the shadows, one fair, pure, with starry eyes of forget-me-nots, the other dark passionate with orbs of lustrous jet—

Three voices seemed to plead:

"I thy *mother bore* thee"

"I thy *lady love* thee"

"I thy *mate seek* thee."

"Mother, your son will do all he can for your happiness."

"And Isabelle's happiness, too."

Aware as he said of the protest in his own heart, the revolt of nature and youth, the straitened civilian within him rose in reply. What choice have I in the face of blood and tradition. Tradition! The Old South! To that dual deity was the grateful mother heart offering paeans of thankfulness though her lips named the Father of All.

CHAPTER VI.

The next afternoon Dr. Lanfrane was pleased to welcome Philip Carewe at his home in Port Le Bec, a mile to the north along the river.

The young man had acceded to his father's request, and well attired and mounted made a creditable appearance as he rode along the shady sanded road.

"So glad to see you, my boy. Regret that I must leave in half an hour. We professionals make a poor showing socially."

"My dear sir, do not consider my boyish affairs of sufficient moment to detain you."

"Fiddle de-dee! As if the Carewe family had not heights of royalty. Now Philip, I'm going at you headlong, and what I have to say strains every prerogative of family friend."

"Indeed you honor me, sir, in so doing. Pray feel no restraint."

"It is a question of your parents' welfare. Your mother is declining rapidly, rapidly." The urgent need at Belleroche is a young mistress, one who brings a fair amount of dowry. I know the old families and how indispensable it is that they should marry properly if we are to hold our own against this damnable invasion of uncouth Yankeeism. Need I say more? It would be an insult to assume you indifferent to a fair lady's regard."

"Thank you, sir, for imputing to me more ap-

preciation than I have shown. Hereafter my rudeness shall be atoned for if courtesy can do it."

"Philip, we look to you for the realization of our dearest hopes."

These words seemed strangely vapid to the laggard in love as he made his way slowly through the palmetto wood that autumn afternoon.

Fleur de Lis was a huge ivy-grown pile of grey stone, with a wondrous lily bordered lake along one side of its tangled grounds.

As the horseman approached by the winding road, the forces that control destiny agitated his thoughts. Why should he be riding to Fleur de Lis in quest of a bride. Because the old family alliance must be strengthened. He must cast himself into the balance to weight the scale for the tribal spirit—clan spirit—the mediaeval cas- the spirit, brooding over the South. It emanated from the marshlands, thickened the glooms of the live oaks. It gilded the haze on canebrake and river. Whence this wild rebellion against it? Perhaps from some English freebooter; the Carewes could trace their descent back to the pirate wars with Spain in Elizabeth's time; perhaps from far-away fires of Celtic blood leaping forth to the clash of cutlasses in Highland fastness foray. But once attaining an assured position, gentlefolk must grace their station with all fitting observance. The whole duty of youth was to fulfill the dear hopes of their elders.

The consummation proceeded. Madame Char-

train was not averse to Mr. Carewe's addresses to her daughter, though she demurred a little at first as becomes a lady of quality. The young ladies had gone to town, but would be home to dinner. Would he remain?

Opportunely Philip and Isabelle found themselves alone in the drawing room after dinner; and Philip's mother was greeted with news by her son on his arrival at home that night.

The effect on the invalid was immediate and astounding. Animated by a spirit that fed on hope she arose took her former place in the household and even entertained friends in honor of the coming event. "Extremely hazardous madame," ventured Dr. Lanfrane when she announced her intention of attending the wedding. Nevertheless the journey was made to the town, Port le Bec, where the ceremony was solemnized in the little Episcopal church. Such a revival of former splendor as there was in the feasting and dancing at Fleur de Lis, that mild lovely night in November, celebrating the alliance of a Carewe and a Chartrain!

The company small, very select, was invited to be present at the home-bringing of the bride to Belleroche. They were all there, the Lamaracs of Wildmere, the Dagonets of Verdillac, the Averills of Poinsetta.

Major and Mrs. Carewe were enthralled by the gentle dignity of their son's wife. As the elder lady weakened and lapsed into helplessness, the

family heart rejoiced in that her will had not been thwarted.

But misfortunes followed fast at Belleroche. Two years after Adelaide Carewe's death, came an awful visitation of yellow fever. Against the pleadings of his wife, Philip Carewe went to New Orleans, alleging important business and returned on the verge of physical collapse, from the disease, dying in three days.

Vainly the young widow strove to keep up the semblance of interest in life for the sake of her infant daughter; but the sense of utter failure had crushed her soul. The man whose name she bore had not given her his heart; and his indifference was growing into neglect. Yet in desperation the thought had taken root. "We will win, now, Evelyn and I"—as unloved wives have staked their all on the advent of babes.

But the battleground vanishes with the romantic struggle at its height.

Silence falls; long, long, silence.

Lately there had been signs of capitulation.

One evening they sat in the arbor, Philip reading Horace, Isabelle sewing, while Evelyn in her perambulator, played with the blossoms that fell into her lap. Suddenly the book was thrust aside and the handsome young father's gaze rested long on the cooing child. When he spoke it was of the necessity of making frequent business trips to Baton Rouge and New Orleans. "Business, business, barter and sale; it taxes all my ingenuity to

keep what we have, Isabelle, but with such a devoted wife any man ought to conquer. You should not have given me your dowry, dear, as you did, even to save the estate."

"Philip, my husband, all I have is yours. Shall I not entrust my little one's future to the wisdom of her father." Then the sudden pleading of looks and words that would live while memory lasted. "Ah, the faith that dwells in a gentle woman's heart! Pray for me, sweet one, that I may not fail in the trust."

All in a maze of startled joy the wife had responded by a rush of tears. Blindly letting fall the needle, she clasped his languid hand in both her thin palms and bowed her head upon them. From that moment life had significance. That instant's response to the call and claim of loyalty, fealty, irradiated years of apathetic unfaith.

The averted gaze the silent parting on the eve of that unaccountable absence were as naught, dissolved in the radiance of that memory that was to lighten the hour when she should know the material truth. They were very gentle with her, the family solicitors; but no need. The fact that she was a destitute widow whose portion had gone into the maw of hydra-headed profligacy, stock pit, lottery, race track, gaming table, courtesan, was as thistle down in the balance with her one freighted moment, satisfying as manna, incense sweet, jewel bright.

Valiantly Major Carewe had held his head high

over the ruin of earthly hopes seeking sympathy from none, but the stern lines of his face were ever ready to relax at sight of Isabelle or little Evelyn.

For a few months the pathetic drooping figure in black crept about the house and grounds, spending hours in the arbor watching her child at play.

The nurse had instructions to give the child as much fresh air as possible and she found her charge more tractable in the arbor than anywhere else, wide-eyed with wonder at the butterflies and kindred creatures on the wing from flower to flower in the vines. The dimpled hands were always held out for blossoms to hold against soft cheeks so like unto rose petals themselves.

"If Philip could see her now," cried the mother heart, "the victory would be ours." Then the sense of finality in failure came in a black surge sweeping away her hold on that memory of a moment jewel-like in a black mine of despair

But it would not be for long and at length she broached the subject of her grandchild's future to the Major. "Since mamma's death and Louise's marriage," she faltered, "you are all in all to Evelyn. When I am gone she will be a great care to you."

"My daughter, let us not talk of going or of care. You are better today—perhaps tomorrow——"

But the gallant old cavalier could say no more in presence of the ravage disease had wrought on

beauty and youth, the wasted frame, the hectic flush, the racking cough, all harbingers of death.

And it was not long tarrying. Ere the half circle of another year, Isabelle had sunk into utter languor, six weeks of this, then the deliriums of the last hours, closing in eternal peace.

"She will not witness the sale of Belleroche. Thank God that the supremest trial is left for me alone," and the Major's voice had the ring of his soldier youth in it.

With Philip's wasting, debts had increased and Major Carewe saw no prospect of redeeming the impoverished plantation. In another year Captain Benham had renewed his offer of purchase and a clearance sale was being contemplated with plans for safe investment of the residue.

The cause of the helpless child at his knee was fit for any knightly espousal. For that prattling four-year-old, that satiny head, those solemn eyes questioning the future; who would not gird on armor.

The flow of immigration toward the golden West had not attracted the typical southern gentleman; but the harrowings of fate stir up the seed ground of the heart to wildings of new ventures. The semi-deserts of Arizona and California were awaiting, but the old, old magic of irrigation to waken into newness of life. With a small outlay a homestead could be secured. The mountain lakes were continually storing up the

life-giving water for the parched plain below. Major Carewe, yearning over the mite of humanity so cruelly defrauded of her inheritance, saw the beckoning hand; heard Hope whisper "It is the only way."

CHAPTER VII.

All a haze of heat, swam the mesa under the rays of the westering sun, but the long low ranch house looked cool in its embowering grove of orchard and shade trees.

The grizzled ranchman on the east porch was not reclining in any restful attitude, but sitting upright scanning the mountain slopes with anxious hawk-like gaze. The child seated on the step patted and stroked the soft ears of Sancho the hound, curled at his master's feet.

"Nice old Sankey, Sankee-e," then timidly glancing upward, "Grandfather!"

"Well, dearie, what is it?"

"May I ask you again now?"

"Ask me what, child?"

"Why-ee you said I might ask again about my arbor when you were not busy, and you're not busy now."

"N-n-o, not very," and the bronzed and bearded features softened somewhat yet wore their air of pre-occupation.

"If I could have an arbor, a little teenty weenty one like we used to play in, Cousin Alice and me, Grandfather, I wakened and saw it last night. The vines all waved and swung, not like they used to be. They had little bells on and they went tinkle tinkle all the time. Alice was there and we made flower ladies of creeper blooms with

morning glory overskirts. Then real fairies peeped out of the roses.

"Evelyn, it seems to me we have a few flower-beds here and vines on the piazza."

"But, oh dear, I don't like them! I want the arbor and the kind we played with—jasmine, clematis, wistaria, and seven sister rose. We had a honeysuckle vine, too. Mammy Juno says she is 'just a honin' foh dat blossom-place lak paradise. Now, Grandfather, can't we have the plants sent out here; I'd 'tend them. We'd have it by the waterbrook in the orchard. You're not listening, Grandfather. Does your head hurt?

The little girl sprang up and began fanning the man who had sunk back in his chair, with her apron.

"I'll ask Mammy for her big fan. Ma'amselle is resting now, I think."

Major Carewe made no effort to destrain his granddaughter, and there was relief in his troubled eyes as he watched the fairy-like form flit through the doorway.

His gaze was fixed on the mountains again when she returned.

"You are pale now, Grandfather, and your face was so red. It makes you sick to look at the mesa so much Mammy says. 'Yo granpaw gwine plum stracted ober dat an' an' dem ditches.' "

"Juno is a spoiled darky and talks too much entirely."

"What did she mean about the ditches. They

look so glittery and shiny down through the fields. They sing a pretty little song and I want my arbor by one of them; but I mustn't bother you any more, if you don't want to hear about the arbor."

"I did not mean that' Evie, but there is so much to think about. You do not understand. Suppose the water stopped coming."

"Why, Grandy, how could it? Isn't there a lake or river up there where it comes from? Does a witch live up there to put a spell on it so it can't run. Senora Estena says witches live in caves."

"Evelyn, Evelyn, you must not listen to the idle talk of gipsies and negroes. They are silly, senseless babblers."

,"I won't any more, nor ask for the arbor any more till Christmas."

"Well, well, child, go to Madamoiselle now. She will be wanting you to dress and brush your hair."

"And I'm to play my piece for you after supper. Ma'amselle says, 'La petite, elle a l'esprit des doigts.' "

But the weary old man did not seem to hear. His mind was wrought to a pitch super-vibrant to the human strain.

Evelyn did not play her new piece for him that night, as the evening was far spent before he emerged from the little piazza room, as it was called, where he had been absorbed in a sheaf of papers from the locked drawer of his desk.

The crescent moon hung in the purple sky over the serrated peaks. The mesa lay in shadow save

for a silvery streak, here and there, on sagebrush, clump and cactus monster. On the border of this desert paradise spread the green tent. On the green strip running down the slope toward him, the man walking back and forth on the piazza gazed with devouring passion and pride. Alfalfa, cotton and cane, teeming luxuriance threaded with life-giving rivulet from mountain snows. The parched mesa seemed a hateful sight; it stood for what had been and what might again be his heritage beneath the skies.

He had gone over the official documents carefully; his rights with the irrigation company were legally secure, yet that only added to his exasperation when he realized the utterly lawless forces against him. This was in the early days of scientific reclamation in California desert lands, and there was infinitely more to contend with than climatic conditions.

The two decades since the civil war had seen the tide of emigration rise to break on hostile headlands on an exceedingly craggy shore. Major Rodney Carewe had been as generous as his countrymen in his offerings to the lost cause and as brave as they in building anew from the fragments of shattered illusion. The goad of a helpless child's need had driven him to enterprise worthy of a cavalier in Coronado's train following the gleam of Eldorado's sinking star. Five years of prospecting and pioneering and the wasted plantation on the Mississippi had been con-

verted to a vast expanse of quasi-desert with the new irrigation project well under way.

As a capitalist the Major was of minor rank among the wealthy ranchers composing the concern; but valued by Engineer Hale as one of those who do not lose a gentleman's self-control.

Time and again had the indomitable will of the southerner astonished those otherwise impressed by a certain idle elegance of manner.

Cattle and sheep ranches bounded The Desert Rose to east and west; but the Major would have naught but cotton and cane of Louisiana. There was a tiny orange grove and cypress and willow interspersed the mimosa and yucca about the house.

This was of white adobe and plaster in mission style with spacious verandas over run by native vines, fountains everywhere supplying the moisture for this veritable oasis.

The portion reclaimed from the desert was yielding superbly and the man on the piazza tried to find surcease in the sigt. But the arid waste on either flank—what of that? His crops were mortgaged to meet the indebtedness on those barren acres. The irrigation plant had suffered costly disaster from recent storms, and a faulty consignment of concrete had delayed the construction of the new dam across the Tahaqui river.

And this late news of disaffection among the workmen,—perhaps already a strike paralyzing the all too laggard pace of progress. If 'twere

not for Evelyn things might go their way. Ah, and my conscience smites me for that cross tone to little Evelyn today. Somehow the child irritates me when I am overwrought. Such a tease about some little fancy or other—oh, I remember now, 'twas a little arbor like the old arbor in Louisiana at Belleroche. Where she and Allie used to play. What tiny things they were, Evie, Isabelle's sunny-headed fairy and Louise's wee lassie of dark curls. How they played with flowers, always some game of blossoms! I refused to consider the arbor project because it seemed so foolish and useless expense when the child has vines and flowers of all California's growing. Enough for a woodsprite let alone an ordinary child; but Evelyn is not an ordinary child nor do I wish her to be. My object in providing a French governess is to make her a young lady of distinction."

All through the night thoughts of Evelyn, her youth and dependence mingled with her grandfather' uneasy slumber, visions, too, of the spendthrift son stricken in youth and the girl-wife fading under the blight of wasted affection.

There had been no thought other than of bringing the little orphan west accompanied, of course, by the faithful Juno, daughter to Mammy Luce, nurse and monitor of long troublous years of war-nurse and monitor through long troublous years of war-time at Belleroche. Five years in the seclusion of Desert Rose Ranch under the tutelage

of Madamoiselle Eugenie Santelle, French impoverished aristocrat, had wrought a wondrous personality in the apt child.

Vivacious and carefree she revelled in out-door life. Lessons were learned and recited on rustic seats beneath blossoming boughs as often as in the school room. On rare ecstatic drives with her grandfather in the light buckboard, she manifest an eerie insight into the myriad life about her that brought to Major Carewe memories of the dreamy impractical son. "My little lad used to ask questions like that trotting at my side on the lawn at Belleroche—dear old plantation," he would sigh and Evelyn would lapse into awed silence. Her mind seemed to cherish a few recollections poignantly, scenes limned on the plastic brain sensitized with the rapture of a child's dream world. Immortal glamour hung over the far-away Louisiana homestead peopled with free negroes, their jollity and sloth.

CHAPTER VIII.

The office of the Mutual Irrigation Company was the scene of a serious consultation. Among the directors were Mr. John McFinney, owner of ten thousand acres newly reclaimed pasturage. Senor Don Miguel, recent purchaser of the La Guayra mission lands since the decline of the Catholic power in that region, and Hon. Mark Blosser, politician and social diplomat of Esmeraldo county-seat, a mountain hamlet of cosmopolitan character. Major Carewe opened the discussion, this being a privilege accorded his personality at these meetings. There was grave anxiety in his looks and tones.

"Gentlemen, we have an unusual problem to solve. The need of increased resources is most pressing. None of the stockholders can extend prospects for another year without additional water facilities.

"The disaffection among the workmen has brought the work nearly to a standstill. Once an absolute strike is declared we are at the mercy of the malcontents, because delay is ruinous now. I understand the trouble originates in prejudice against the oriental element employed."

Senor Miguel was eager for retaliatory measures. "Yield not an inch" he counselled. "It will not last long. The masons will be back in three days when they get more hungry. No more care

if Jap and Chinaman work alongside then. All in harmony. We can afford that pequeno."

"Right ye arre," commended Mr. McFinney. "Always a few hids must be broke, ye know. The interduction o' furraners be a bit o' rough house th' toime injurin, ye know, but 'twill all kem out in the wash."

The laughter at this subsided as Hon. Mark rose to speak. "Late news from the camp gives me great alarm. The feeling is intense, rioting has begun. When attacked by the Mexicans the Japanese workmen stood their ground, showing unexpected fighting qualities. Neither force will work to-morrow unless the other be discharged from our employ. The superintendent laid off the entire gang with full pay pending adjustment. There was nothing else but to allow them to stab each other. Now allow me to submit a cooperative plan. There are no more than a dozen Chinks, as the men call them. I can employ half that number on my ranch and in the house in town. They prefer gardening and tree planting and I will better their present wage. Can the gentlemen present offer employment on the remaining six? With the gradual reclamation of waste land, will come a steady demand for farm labor which will help solve the oriental problem for us.

The plan met with ready acceptance. Major Carewe, fully aware of the supernumeraries about The Desert Rose, promised to provide a Jap boy

with employment as gardener and general servitor.

The meeting adjourned with this half way measure. No mention was made of the shortage of skilled workmen, a thing for which Engineer Hale had requested special consideration.

Anxious thoughts concerning the delay in construction of the new dam occupied the Major's meditations on his way homeward. Increase of water supply was needed, and time meant so much. His holdings in the company were so small that his rights enabled the reclamation of but a tiny strip of mesa year by year and at present every atom of outlay must yield prompt returns. The money for enlargement had been advanced by taking toll of the future.

Riding through the narrow lanes he viewed the whitening billows of cotton and rank masses of heavy-headed cane with joy and pride; yet underneath, the tug of necessity made itself felt. Those crops must be harvested, carefully marketed at the best rates, if obligations were to be met and credit given. How sharp the sting of wounded pride such natures, scornful of sordid bargaining, alone can know.

With the sight of the first grinning negro, a sense of welcome home came to the proprietor of The Desert Rose. "Here, Sam," as he flung the reins. "Give Sultan a rub down and come around for orders in about an hour—No; wait, Sam, I'll tell you now that we shall have a new

boy, a Japanese, to help round to-morrow and I expect you to be very agreeable, no quarreling understand."

"Yassuh, yassuh," then as his master walked majestically toward a group of idlers near the kitchen door. "Wunner what he gwine dat way, foh. Spec' he dun tiahed dese yer gipsies. Dat ol' yarb woman got dat lim' o' Satan boy wid huh 'gin. Ol' Marse ain't gwine stan' it I bet." This last was addressed to his half brother, Mulatto Ike. "Heah 'im say he got a Jap boy nex'? Spec' it some ornery cuss. Yuh see dat wizzle face yarb woman boy hangin' roun' yere? Ain't fur no good. He mammy wan' git him a job, but law shucks!

The "Yarb Woman" detached herself from the knot of servitors and came toward the master of the house. Her physique was of unusual grace even among gipsies, and instead of the usual gayly flowered cotton she wore a dark print of neat pattern. The flat basket on her head was removed to do deep obeisance.

"Buenos dias, Senor."

How do you do, Senora, how is the herb trade to-day? I told Juno to purchase whatever was needed."

"Si, Senor, it is well; but I have something else to ask the good man. My son here," beckoning forward a half bold, half shrinking lad of the outcast type. "He must work. There is nothing up there in the arroyo, nothing. Those

men among the rocks they hammer, hammer, and he go with them maybe and I no more see him. What they say him he no tell, but it is all evil, evil, Diablerie I am sure. You have work, there are fields and the garden."

"Yes, yes, I see. Manuelo must be kept out of mischief. Come again, Senora, manana."

"Gracias Senor, manana, adios."

And this was the outcome of plans for retrenchment! Major Carewe in the face of mounting expense, had taken under his roof two more refugees from the war of economic forces, wages and labor, thereby adding to the debit side of his ledger. He mused on the situation with cynical wonderment at himself yet with pride that the open-handed generosity of the Old South could survive transplanting. There was much to occupy the thoughts of the weary aging man that evening hour on the piazza. Knowing his mood, Madamoiselle had kept Evelyn at her practicing and embroidery longer than usual; but at length the daintily shod feet had crossed the floor unheard and two lace clad arms were clasped about his neck and shining locks mingled with the iron gray of age.

"Guess who, grandfather! You know! Those were the very first words I ever learned to speak. Mammy says—Oh, I forgot! You told me not to repeat mammy's sayings or the senora's, either. Please pardon me, I forgot."

Never mind, child; never mind! My Evie wouldn't disobey grandfather.

"No, no; but let me just ask of if Manuelo wouldn't be good to help round? His mother is so worried. She told us how he ran away sometimes and stays with men camping on the mountains. They coax him away, she says."

"Senora Estena wants a favor I see, and of course she will get it. This Manuelo is probably a ne'er do well."

"I most asked about the arbor, too."

"You may get it, dear. Miracles are happening every day."

CHAPTER IX.

Next morning witnessed the installation of the raw recruits to the ranks of servitors at The Desert Rose. Hamo, the slim brown oriental, flitted about the wash house as silently as a moth. Juno was "mos' laid up wid de mis'ry in mah back," and it was thought best to delegate the Jap her assistant, sending Zeke to the stables where he and Sam found many diversions and much time for conversation. Major Carewe found more difficulty in placing the herbwoman's son. Pedro, the gardener did not fancy the tattered nondescript of the slinking gait, so the lad was finally set to tend water gates and herd cows.

A letter by special messenger announced that work on the Tahaqui had been resumed, though hindered by delay in supplies and depletion of workmen. So the grim veteran of more than physical warfare set his powers anew against defeat. "Let the future threaten." Thus the inward resolve shaped itself. "Its menace shall not darken my Evelyn's sky yet. She shall have her heart's desire."

And so the miracle was achieved. Out on the border of the orange grove an octagon of pillars rose to be crowned with a pagoda like roof. From the first strke of the builder's hammer the structure had been the center of interest and comment at Desert Rose.

As one who fears to wake from a dream, Evelyn watched the progress of the work. Major Carewe had allowed the child's wishes free play—under the benevolent dictatorship of Madamoiselle—and the new arbor was to be "just like the one we used to play in, Allie and I. Diplomatic indeed were the letters of Madamoiselle to the present owner of Belleroche on the Mississippi.

Diplomacy won and the post from Emeraldo brought a wonderful box of rooted vines and rose slips, fresh and vigorous in their bed of damp moss.

Planting day was a holiday of course. Pedro had waived his rights, (a magnanimous concession), and Evelyn was to really scoop out a resting place for each tiny plant, and with her own fingers press the soil about each tender root.

The event was delayed for an hour by the arrival of unexpected company. Engineer Hale rode down to confer with Major Carewe on matters of the construction camp. He was accompanied by his son Richard and a strange youth who was introduced as Master Louis Brantome, son of an old friend in Carolina.

The presence of strangers, particularly the lads with amused countenances, made the occasion a trying one for Evelyn. The child had been in a transport since the arrival of the precious plants, re-reading the labels, "Jasmine, Wistaria, Bougainvillea, Honeysuckle, Seven Sister Rose. How did you ever make them understand, Ma'amselle,

just what I have wanted so long? So long that my heart ached and I was hungry all over. But I'm so happy now that I can never be sad again unless they die, the dear vines."

"Ah non, ne parley-vous pas a mourir pour les belles plantes, Madamoiselle. C'est la vie! la vie!"

It is all to please my little girl, apologized Major Carewe to his guests as they watched the demure little figure in bright blue dress and broad hat, tripping alongside her governess and followed by a wild gipsy-looking lad carrying a basket of garden tools. Senora Estena, Mammy Juno, Sam, Zeke, Pedro, Hamo,and all the rest followed—a genuinely triumphal procession. The heart of Desert Rose beat high exultant over the fulfillment of a child's whim—the child mistress of the ranch and darling of them all.

Awkward with eagerness the excited little maid jabbed the soft earth with her trowel, set each plant more or less askew. Then plucking at the Major's sleeve, "Dear Grandfather, please, ask Senora Estena to sing. She is a wise woman and knows what the Indians do. They sing at a planting for good luck!"

"With all my heart, dear. Senora, favor us with a song, please. We shall all be charmed."

Evidently eager for the opportunity, the herb woman complied. Her voice and looks so strangely wild gave the whole scene a magic significance.

The amusement of the audience gave place to

awed silence at the last stanza with its note of prophecy.

"Green wil they grow, the clasping vine and vine,
"For love, for hate, they twine and twine,
"And close the climbing web within
"A web of fate is spun so thin
"For good, or ill, the spiders spin."

The gipsy's eyes were raised to heaven, her body swaying to the rhythm, her hands moving in mystic passes over the vines at her feet. Major Carewe's brows met in anger though his features maintained the composure of master and host. His dignity saved the situation from harlequinade and gaucherie.

"The woman is an herbseller and regards herself a sort of retainer here. We indulge her because of the virtues of her wares and then she has a pathetic story," he explained as the gathering dispersed.

"I have heard," rejoined Mr. Hale, "that she and her son live in a cabin perched somewhere on the wall of Forked Canyon. She forsook the gipsy life years ago, I understand, and was in the mission school awhile. Her husband mistreated the poor creature dreadfully."

"And the son is like him, will likely bring his mother naught but grief and shame. Her devotion to him is touching. Hale, I am getting to be an old man, silly and garrulous. Pardon my seeming indifferent attitude toward business. You have something of importance to state."

"Business, sir, in regard to the company's projects is stable I think if slow. No more workmen available ,but I anticipate a season of peace and quiet and that means much. The inherent lawlessness with which we have to deal might take the form of violence against our property; such disasters cannot be foreseen. That is the greatest menace now."

"Quite the greatest, Mr. Hale. With the favor of fortune I had hoped to reclaim a larger area than in any previous year; but it is not possible until the completion of the dam."

"Unfortunately so; the original lake tributaries having been tapped by contemporary corporations, the water supply is barely sufficient for present needs. Meantime we must bear our ills. However, I really came to ask a favor."

The Major's high-bred aquiline features softened with the glow, a call for generosity always evoked.

"Mr. Hale, I shall be most happy to oblige you if it lies within my power."

"Thank you; will you take charge of a small trust fund for me? As guardian of Louis Brantome I have a fe wthousand to loan, and if you can use the money——"

"Sir, I am overwhelmed! The money will relieve some obligations and I can give mortgages to secure your ward against possible loss."

"He has a sort of claim on me, his father's lifelong friend, but it is not a responsibility of my

own choosing. His youth and peculiar disposition render guardianship rather formidable. I am glad to say that he is studious. Handsome, don't you think?"

Both men, looking out through the door of the small library, found interest in the dark slender lad on the piazza reading a pocket volume of some kind. Richard Hale was strolling up and down the gravelled walk beneath the mimosas. "See, my sturdy lad is not reading," added Hale; "he is an active, stirring youngster. Their tempers clash frequently. Louis has dark sullen moods. Poor Stephen allowed him his head entirely and now he is defiant if balked in the least whim. Richard is not fond of literary studies, his bent is mathematical and scientific——"

"Encourage him! Do not attempt to force the classics on an unwilling mind. I thank God, sir, for an inborn aptitude in that direction. My father possessed a rare appreciation of Horace, Homer, Shakespeare and Marlowe, and he sent me to a university. These," and he waved a hand toward the closely filled shelves, "were companions of my thought in the old plantation days. Ah, there came an hour of sacrifice for the cause we believed in! And the graces of life perished in a reconstruction that was creation from chaos itself."

The younger man sat listening with admiration at the note of loyal pride in the voice of the elder and hastened to say:

"Your counsel is able and I hope to avail myself of it often in this problem of juvenile training—two-fold as it happens. Louis is in the Franciscan school at Alcala, Richard has entered the Colorado Technical. Both seem fairly apt and tractable."

"I am honored, sir, in your confidence and with the upbringing of little Evelyn on my mind keep awake to this momentous problem. Will you remain for luncheon?"

Mr. Hale, having already risen declined on plea of an engagement with his lawyer.

Major Carewe came out with his guest and Richard and Louis came to take leave of the host. In the few moments of conversation, while waiting for the horses, the Major noted keenly the antagonism between the youths, the round-faced ruddy Saxon of stocky frame and the challenging Latin temperament, with its listless scorn of glance and supercilious curve of thin nostrils and lips.

"My friend, the engineer, realizes the seriousness of his task. That is well," thought the Major.

Returning to his desk he became so absorbed in calculating the wisest application of the recent windfall, that the luncheon bell was unheeded while Juno grumbled in the kitchen.

"Clah fo' it Ol' Marse haint de gemmun he pa war! Heah I dun thought we had comp'ny fo' lunch lak ol' times. De quality didn't useter rush off dat away. Ol' Marse pa he sot up like a ramrod in he cheer a' ma'ch roun' so proud. Don't

boddah he haid 'bout dem figgahs none. Nebbah so much as puckah he fo'haid. I say quality comin' down an' we all drag tailin' wid it. Dey comin' now, dat sweet putty chile an' him. Hump yo' se'f now, Zeke, and Hamo, pull yo' jacket straight!"

True enough the caste of arrogance, idleness and ease *had* come down. Gone forever the generation of those who toil not nor spin; but the imperishable essence of its spirit abides.

Each succeeding year saw a new strip of mesa reclaimed on the Desert Rose. Every cycle brought more luxuriance of bud and bloom to the arbor of a child's dream. The next decade whitened the head of Major Carewe and bowed his shoulders while it evolved a wondrous personality of womanhood in his granddaughter.

CHAPTER X.

The years of Evelyn Carewe's schooling were long and monotonous at the ranch.

Madamoiselle Eugenie had selected the institution of Chartrain tradition—a select school for young ladies at present in charge of the widow of an eminent Episcopal clergyman. There in the environs of New Orleans, Evelyn and Aunt Louise's daughter, Alice Dauphine, had applied their hearts unto wisdom, the lore of girlhood gleaned from poetic flashes, historic disclosures, prophetic revelations, fleeting friendships,—all that moulds the plastic mind.

When the finished young lady returned to The Desert Rose she was accompanied by Miss Alice Dauphine, the vivacious cousin, whose small dark plumpness offered a perfect foil for the tall Evelyn's lofty poise of head and clear-cut features lit by hazel eyes with glints of blue.

With the advent of the young ladies renewed hospitality manifested itself in exchange courtesy with the neighboring ranch owners. Madamoiselle Eugenie had been prevailed upon to return as chaperon and referee in all matters social.

Senora Miguel and her daughters were the most frequent guests. Ponderous and overdressed though she was, the Spanish lady achieved a dignity that served well for background against

which the brilliancy of Senorita Carlotta and Senorita Mercedez' charms shone. Good-natured girls both albeit vain of their bright eyes and glowing cheeks destined to catch handsome husbands from among the throng of gay revellers at the big untidy rancho with its carefree entertaining.

Richard Hale and Louis Brantome were always included in invitations to these functions, though the latter rarely attended.

At the age of twenty-three Richard was already his father's trusted and capable assistant. Gifted with mechanical genius, he had applied himself to the study of engineering and improvements in the clumsy devices of primitive irrigation were already to his credit.

Louis Brantome remained the same moody recluse, a prodigy of learning the padres attested. Since completing the course at Alcala Mission he had become interested in the study of natural history; and Mr. Hale remarked that in time his ward might evolve a normal consideration and concern for human beings. At the Desert Rose his reserve gave way at times to a geniality as gratifying as surprising, the chill of his demeanor often infecting the spirit of the occasion. Alice Dauphine took the credit of this to herself and no one disputed the account although he seldom talked at any length.

"Such a courtly listener" she was wont to declare; "he appreciates a lively conversationalist."

One glorious spring evening the four were rid-

ing homeward from an afternoon merienda at the Miguel rancho. Richard and Evelyn in advance of Louis and Alice rode briskly for the first five miles, then with slackened rein fell into a walk for conversation's sake.

"Miss Carewe, you amaze me.'

"How, Mr. Hale?"

"By your adaptiveness. This must all be so crude and empty after the thronged streets of a city like New Orleans, yet your mien is that of fondness for this mesa of sage-brush and cactus. You gaze on them kindly."

"Perhaps that is the best way to dispose of ever present objects."

"Do you mean to invest their ugliness with a halo of imagined beauty?"

"Not 'imagined', the beauty is there in everything, waiting to be evoked. That is true of this valley. Nature left it a barren waste, yet with this hidden wealth within, awaiting the touch of science. The vital forces waken as of old water gushed from the smitten rock. But I am ridiculous, a boarding school miss quoting truisms of pedantry."

"Ridiculous? By no means! Go on please and apply your truisms to human nature. My father is constantly urging me to draw Louis Brantome out, in the attempt to transform him into a better natured, better mannered creature."

"Hadn't you better delegate that to Alice?"

They both laughed with tacit understanding of

Alice's innocent wiles, as the pair came in sight. A few moments later the party had dismounted at the Desert Rose terrace and the young men were hesitating over Major Carewe's invitation to spend the evening. Louis demurred on account of important mail matter due severel days since. "My camera supplies from Frisco," he explained, "I had thought to telegraph from Emeraldo if they did not arrive to-day."

"Oh, come now, Brantome" and the Major's hand on the youth's shoulder was very cordial. "You cannot take photographs to-night. Sacrifice yourself to an old man's pleasure. We grow selfish in our dotage."

"The pleasure is all mine, thank you" Louis managed by way of acceptance whereupon Alice beamed commendation that the alien youth was amenable to social law really. But a later turn threatened backsliding when the host proposed a house party for the following week.

They were all in the parlor, Evelyn had been singing, Alice playing accompaniment and Richard turning the music. Apparently oblivious Louis's eyes devoured page after page of the book on his knee.

"This is cheer to an old rancher's heart," warmly commented the Major. Thus is youth renewed in the presence of gallantry and beauty. Evelyn, my dear, you and Alice have transplanted the flower of our social system, that of the Old South, here to grow for us a paradise regained, rid of

the poison-weed that lost us the first—slavery, the nettle we were too timorous to grasp because of its sting. But I am wandering from what I have to state. Important letters call me away next week and I wish you would invent some gayety for yourselves. Have one of those house parties after the old regime. Enlist Madamoiselle Eugenie. She will enjoy arranging the details, everything correct, in style."

"Delightful! Whom shall we invite?" came from both girls at once.

"Why, you know. Mr. Hale, here and his brother. Mr. Brantome, Mr. and Mrs. Pringle, who entertained us at dinner, and others."

"You remember what a charming dinner it was, don't you Alice?" said Evelyn. "There was Mrs. Pringle's brother, a lawyer, Mr. Wainright. We must include him and Carlotta and Mercedes Miguel."

"I could not forget Mrs. Pringle's surprising manner, and the tact she uses with that big bluff husband, so amusing. Shall you issue the invitations soon, Evelyn?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Manuel and Hamo are swift messengers. The gentlemen present are already bidden."

"Though they have not accepted," laughed Alice. Perhaps they have something better in prospect, in which case we shall postpone our entertaining."

Richard expressed his pleasure in the oppor-

tunity. "A week later would have found me lashed to the thwarts. Our new machinery arrives then and the plant must be put in working order without delay. At present I am of the same order of flitting winged moth as Hugh Wainwright and Louis here."

The pleasantry was ill-taken by Louis. There was resentment in his tone. "I plead guilty to the charge of idleness, as long as I do not build machines; but next week my photography keeps me in the dark room."

"Abode of mysteries," jested Richard, "from the things that come out of it. I wish Major Carewe and the ladies could see those early attempts. To the amateur photographer nothing is sacred. If he sought his prey now from creatures fitted for their own defense; but he spies upon the unwary and feeble of the wild—birds, nestlings even, horned toads, crickets, grasshoppers——"

"Spiders and their webs," amended Louis. "They are my favorites now. I hope for some marvels in webs when I develop my negatives for microscopic slides. There are some dark nooks in the cellar at home where fine specimens abound. Major Carewe, may I claim a would-be scientist's excuse for attending to my business, or *fad,* as Richard terms it."

"Certainly, sir, I respect your reasons. Still it is a pity. My dear fellow, why didn't I think of it before. You can bring your photographic

outfit along. Take that little room in the basement and use it for your developing. There are two or more vacant apartments, eh, Evelyn?"

"Yes, grandfather; one next the wine cellar."

CHAPTER XI.

Preparations for a social week of four days occupied the brief interval since the Major's initiative.

Madamoiselle Eugenie was happy in the exercise of housewifely talents long repressed. Evelyn deferred to her in all things pertaining to the housing of the guests. Mammy Juno's culinary skill had not deteriorated with the lapse of years since her creole training. Her roasts and broils were as savory, her "beat biscuit' 'and pound cake as feathery, her jelly float as ethereal, as in old plantation days.

When Evelyn went out to the arbor with her writing materials next day, she found Manuel at work training the vines. He was all obedience to act as messenger.

"The senorita wishes I go queeck?"

"If you please, Manuel. And I wish to tell you how pleased I am with the way you have kept my arbor. The wistaria and honeysuckle are coming into bloom and such masses of roses. I shall tell the guests how faithful you have been."

"Si, senorita, gracias."

"Your mother, Senora Estena, has not been here lately. Tell her our stock of herbs needs replenishing."

"Si, senorita."

CHAPTER XII.

"*Would you have thought it of him?*" queried Miss Alice Dauphine crossly of her cousin. "*Now would* you, Evelyn? You know any *body* might know that your grandfather suggested accommodating Louis Brantome with a dark room ,out of civility, *mere civility,* to offset Louis's lack of courtesy that evening. He has really taken your grandfather at his word and brought the whole abominable business along."

"We ought not to object, Allie? It amuses me to see the young enthusiast so devoted to his hobby, and you so put out over it."

"Why, oh why could not that developing wait five or six days?"

"Because, my dear, this explorer is trying experiments and *must* see results. Have you not read thrilling stories of bacteriologists and their agonized vigils over 'cultures.' When I consider their devotion my frivolity stands rebuked."

"You are not frivolous, Evelyn. Our guest is lacking in appreciation of our hospitable plans."

"He will surely accompany us on our picnic to the canyon to-morrow, and get into the spirit of it all by the evening of the Miguel entertaining."

This topic formed the bed-time talk of the two girls on the night after arrival of the guests.

Alice's apprehensions were relieved next morning when Louis presented himself as her escort

for the ride to Forked Canyon. Mr. and Mrs. Pringle, Clifford Hale and Mercedes Miguel drove in the Pringle's road wagon with their high mettled black ponies. Richard Hale accompanied Carlotta. Hugh Wainright and Evelyn were later in starting than the others, domestic affairs having detained the hostess. They rode rapidly across the level stretch of mesa overtaking the advance party at the turn into the canyon road or trail entering the valley that narrowed to an arroyo, in turn becoming a miniature canyon whose craggy sides, viewed from below, towered in minarets and spires of red brown and gray against the blue sky.

The little cavalcade wound along tortuous paths among boulders and cactuses in blithe anticipation of the soft spot destined for rest and refreshment. Alice and her escort were on ahead as guides. "The place was made known to us by Manuel, that Mexican boy at the ranch. His people live up here among the cliffs where there is a spring. This is called Forked Canyon on account of another stream joining it that enters through this branch canyon. This has worn a channel along one side, the water comes from springs of recent dates. They originated from some volcanic disturbance and the cliffs have blossomed into verdure for miles on that side. See that splash of green along the line of rocks. Where it ceases we turn into the side canyon."

"What a charming place, a bit of desert para-

dise. What are those white objects forther along the main canyon—tents?"

"I presume so. Manuel says there are many prospectors, some with assaying outfits, others with hammers and specimen cases. Manuel and his mother, the herb woman, look upon them as intruders, bandits, gipsies. Senora Estena belongs to some gipsy tribe or other. She is afraid of Manuel's being enticed away by some strollers sometime; but he seems steady enough according to Major Carewe's opinion. Evelyn has to listen to Juno's constant complaints of the dilatoriness of the servants about the plantation—or ranch—I should say. Here we are where the little rivulet loses itself in the sand! How pitiful to see!"

There was a chorus of admiration from the entire party as turning the sharp angle of the canyon wall the picnic-ground smiled from the shelving slope. Here was the winding tracery of the rill from the boulders above, writ large in verdure overwhelming rock and waste. For the space of a half dozen rods on either side the leaping cascades shed their beneficence, the waters flowing away from the foot of the rock in a silvery rill, running swiftly to its death in the sand.

Half hidden in the brush wood a grotesque dwelling appeared, an uncouth structure of clay cemented rock, from the chimney of which rose a thin curl of smoke. Before the unloading had time to begin two figures were seen coming down the path and greeted with delight.

"Senora Estena, and Manuel. I see by your looks we are welcome," cried Evelyn gayly. "We invite you to join us. Our luncheon is to be spread in that bower under the willows. We beg your hospitality for some hot water for the tea making."

"Si, senorita, welcome! Me—I tell you how me so delight w'en Manuel he bring the presen's last night. Gracias!"

"Never mind, you are paying for them by inviting us into your house."

"Sure, ladies, come in and rest, Manuel will ten' ze ponies."

The interior of the hut was inviting, white-washed walls, red calico curtains, huge ollas filled with wild flowers. "We must peep into the kitchen en and see the new cooking stove," said Alice. "Ah, what is this in your workbasket?—knitting and drawn work. See Evelyn, how lovely."

"If it please the senorita I have pride in it. It is from Indian squaws I learn. 'Twas the sisters at the convent, the blessed hermanas, Bernicia and Alvira, santas almas, '*requiescant in pacem.*' I know the Latin for the dead. They are gone now, the hermanas, and I loved them so. But one must not be sad on a merienda like this. The kettle is on to boil for the tea. We shall serve you, Manuel and I."

The company gathered in the shade of thick trees and vines, relished their chicken sandwiches,

salad, fruit and cake with the keen appetites of youth and health.

Afterwards a few brief attempts at cliff climbing gave exercise for whatever spirit of adventure might animate anyone.

Kindly, Mrs. Pringle interested herself in the herb woman's store of dried roots and plants, as well as her primitive housekeeping. She was soon joined by Evelyn Carewe who had pleaded fatigue when asked to join the young people in their rambles, to the discomfiture of Hugh Wainright, whose pleasure in her society was very evident.

"My dear Miss Carewe," Mrs. Princle exclaimed at sight of Evelyn, "did you ever see such a store of herbs? So many kinds! And this drawn work is wonderful. Senora, you are a very industrious woman."

"Ah, the lady is most kind. The hands must have something to do when days are long and the mucho is away."

"It is of the son, Manuel, I wish to speak," said Miss Carewe. "*El buenos hijo.* He is so faithful, tends my rose vines about the summer house just as when I was a little tease, demanding service of some one constantly. Grandfather was indulgent to build it for me, when we could scarcely afford irrigation at all. Manuel was a little fellow then."

"Eight years old."

"So he must be eighteen now. Why, Senora,

you cannot expect to keep him at home. He is at The Desert Rose part of the time."

The gaunt woman's lined face had somewhat relaxed. "Ah ,the good Senor Carewe! He saved my lad, my little lad from the wandering life—the gipsy blood is ever calling."

"*Gipsy* blood?"

"Yes, gracious lady, that was what the sainted hermanas said. I must forget the gipsy blood. They taught me the holy faith and when I pray to the blessed virgin she smiles on me. Her heart was broken too. She had a dear muchacho."

"It is good that you pray, Senora Estena, and the praying will make you happy. The Father in heaven will take care of Manuel."

CHAPTER XIII.

Finding the Mexican lad about the arbor next day, Evelyn sought to convey to his mind some sense of filial obligation. She commended his faithfulness, and told him of his mother's anxiety. "La madre she is sad sometimes but she is all happiness when I tell her you are a good son."

The boy turned on her a wild beseeching look.

"Pray, senorita, lovely lady, do not call me good. I am far from it. I wander, wander away, and la madre she does not know, she cannot understand."

"Why, Manuel, how can you! Promise me you will not run away with gipsies."

"Oh, I return! Ah, yes! Sometime the Major and all know. But please don't call me *good*. I not bear it."

"Why not tell me all about this, this badness. Trust me, Manuel."

"Sometime lady, sometime all come right."

Tumultous approach of a laughing chattering group sent Manuel about his work and directed the attention of Miss Carewe. Hugh Wainright, Clifford Hale, Mercedes Miguel and Alice Dauphine all flung themselves into seats breathless from a race along the path.

"Where is that elder brother of mine?" queried Clifford. "I supposed he and Louis were here. There he comes, looking as raspy as Aunt Aga-

tha's poll parrot. Who's that scowl for? Louis isn't here."

"Of course not,too civilized for him. I left him in his dark room, walled in with his precious photographs, films, negatives—whatever they are. He has my opinion in plain terms. Louis has had the rearing of a gentleman. There's no excuse for such churlishness."

"I hope you did not quarrel," spoke up anxious Alice.

"I'd rather your ladyship did not ask. Truth leads oft to the confessional," was the reply; and Evelyn's tact alone saved the situation. She announced that tea would be served in the arbor at an earlier hour than usual to give time for preparations for the evening. All were invited to attend the dinner and dance given by the gracious Senora Miguel, who had made ready for a great fete. Her entertaining was famed. Everybody would be delighted.

As Hugh Wainright and Richard Hale walked toward the house together, the latter's pent up indignation spoke—

"Hugh, I'm in a deuced ill humor to-day. You must have noted at some time, Louis Brantome's mortal antipathy toward me. You lawyer fellows are so keen on psychology, that it's easy for you to see; but a dense chap like myself—I don't know why he should elect to be such a boor when I'm around."

"As your father's solicitor and legal advisor I

know young Brantome as his ward and that the fortune involved is the cause of needless anxiety. When Louis becomes of age it will be handed over to a rather ungrateful person."

"Say, rather, an ingrate. He imagines me enjoying some of his proceeds, as my father of course gets his percentage."

"Since his fourteenth year Louis has deemed himself capable of managing his own finances. You know he is a Catholic, and the padres at Alcala have inoculated him with the idea that the Hales are revelling in his rightful revenue, which if donated to Holy Mother Church would insure Aves and Paternosters enough to waft Louis's soul through any purgatory; no matter what cavortings said soul might indulge in. Legal sense, he has none, and that proneness to fads—"

"Society will counteract that—Miss Alice Dauphine now—eh?"

"Ah, my dear fellow, so I had deluded myself—and here he is refusing to even consider the ball at Senor Miguel's to-night. Oh, we had a precious row. He has no excuse some new books on that mighty science photography. He is conceited enough to imagine himself eminent in that some day. I reminded him of his father's concern for his welfare in entrusting him to my father's care, of the efforts we are all making, lastly the kindness of the ladies in giving us a beatific week. I overstepped my bounds no doubt."

"That's a pity. Brantome would be quick to take offence, considering the lines already too straitened. Perusal of the elder Brantome's will shows him to have been a person of rigid ideas. The son is not allowed free disposal of his own income. His education was meagerly provided for. A youth like that ought to travel but that must wait until he is of age. Quite natural that he should rebel; but his attitude toward his guardian and yourself is inexcusable."

"We have borne much of his unreason and ill-temper, and my father has strained his powers under the will to the utmost for the indulgence of caprice and whim. Perhaps I was a bit officious, but his clownish behavior in regard to Senora Miguel's hospitality—"

"Well, he may veer round yet."

"If he doesn't, he gets another drubbing from me."

"Ah, tut, tut, tut, Hale. Let it pass. You are getting obsessed, hagridden, with this brother's keeper idea."

CHAPTER XIV.

Senor Miguel's great adobe dwelling was a scene of the crude lavish hospitality of prosperous ranch life. The party from The Desert Rose had dined with the Senor's family in the long hall at a table richly spread. Later additional company gathered for the dance in the salon.

Twinkling lights against the flower-decked walls brought out the brilliant red of the musician's jackets, the rainbow hues of brocaded silks, the gleam of gold on white necks and arms. Out in the plaza, fountains tinkled and blossoms shed their perfume on the warm air. Here chatting groups and strolling couples watched the whirling figures within through the long windows.

"Alice is disappointed to-night," remarked Evelyn to Richard Hale. "I may say *highly indignant.*"

"And with perfect right. I hope Louis is ignored from this time forth."

"Oh, do not be unkind. There are always extenuating circumstances."

"Not in this case. Louis is tired of our society and of Alice; and takes this way of ordering us to leave him alone. I know him, you see."

"Sometimes we presume to know: when familiarity of close acquaintance has blinded us with illusions. I discovered that at school. But one must not preach."

"Go on, Miss Carewe. Evelyn you have a willing listener. We need the wisdom of women, we men, with our headlong conclusions. A woman's restraining hand could draw us back from many a precipice. Wordsworth's ideal —

"A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, to command."

"I fear you grow restive under feminine restraint. Remember how you and Clifford used to plot mutiny against your Aunt Agatha and how comical her assumption of authority seemed?"

"To us hobble-de-hoys—yes; but we do grow up finally if not to the full stature of manhood, at least toward understanding."

"I grant you all that and more; but why this confidence—in me?"

"Why confide in you? Evelyn, Evelyn, let us sit here in this nook where the light falls on your head and what stammering I can do may explain."

But Evelyn did not like the proffered seat. Just then the waltz came to a close and the dancers came out thronging the plaza. A fan tapped Richard's shoulder; and a soft voice said, "Pardon, Senor Hale, my frien' I beg to introduce——" At the same time a tall figure in uniform bowed before Evelyn. Miss Carewe, may I claim this dance?"

With a polite, "Excuse me, Mr. Hale," Evelyn was gone and Richard found himself whirling through the mazes of the next dance with a pert and vivacious Miss Darcy, and later saying agreeable nothings to her on the plaza.

CHAPTER XIV.

The arbor was the usual refuge from boredom said listlessness; and an hour after the late breakfast next morning it was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Pringle, Hugh Wainright and Alice Dauphine, amusing each other with impressions of last night's fiesta. Evelyn Carewe and Mercedes Miguel, at some distance among the shrubbery, were clipping blossoms for the house.

"Where is Louis Brantome?" queried Hugh. "I saw him walking about the grounds and thought to carry out a fell purpose I have of teasing him with what he missed last night."

"What effrontery!" laughed Mr. Pringle. "You'd taunt a St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar."

"No fun badgering Louis. Try Miss Carewe's pet kitten here on my knee," and the pudgy red hand stroked the snowy fur of the tiny creature.

"Oh, Alex, how can you jest about Mr. Brantome! Such a thoughtful interesting young face! A mystery to me," protested Mrs. Pringle.

"More than a mystery; he's a picture puzzle to me, my dear Caroline," responded the imperturbable Mr. Pringle, "an enigma, if you please, which I solve by granting him to be a genius of the incipient scientist sort. There he comes from the basement door over there. Why, bless my soul, Caroline, look! What are those boys doing with him? Seem to be supporting him."

"He is ill! Mr. Brantome—fainting!" cried Alice.

The whole group had risen by this time, and crowded down the steps to meet the strange fateful something, that the pale tottering youth was trying to tell.

"Gentlemen! Mr. Pringle! Please keep the ladies back. Hugh—it's awful, what has happened! In the basement—Richard—the boys found him."

Mr. Pringle and Hugh had each seized an arm and waved aside the terror-stricken Jake and Sam.

"Here, sit down, Brantome, and tell us."

"No, no, no; come and see for yourselves, but not the ladies. Tell them Richard is hurt. He's in the basement."

But there was no keeping anybody back. Drawn by the lure of tragedy, the entire household converged toward the dim little passage-way leading from the steps of the outdoor entrance, where on the rough cement floor between the door of the wine cellar and Louis Brantome's workshop or dark-room lay the body of Richard Hale.

The only evidences of murder were the pool of blood beneath the head and a heavy gnarled club or walking stick, clutched in the stiffening fingers of the extended right hand.

The coroner from Emeraldo found a discoloration directly over the heart due to a heavy blow.

The contusion on the head indicated skull fracture.

"Death from a blow by an unknown person and resultant fall" was the coroner's verdict, little heeded in the suspicious mutterings that arose from the moment of the gruesome discovery by Sam, who had been sent to sweep the cellar floor. It was the negro whom Evelyn questioned immediately, and in presence of the dead body.

"Yas, Miss Ev'lyn, dis way I comed fum de outside doah an' see de wine cellar doah blam open an' an' sumpin' layin' close de wall—er—humans! Yassum, I says an' a gemmun, too. Den I yell fer Jake an' we crope up an' I guess we bofe yells at sight o' dat blood an' dem starin' eyes. Oh, my Gawd! Den we sorter git our feet gwine, an' on de steps we runs slam bang inter Marse Louis. We shows him and he laigs look like dey gwine drap him foah we ebber gits him to de aih."

"That will do, Sam. See that you tell the coroner that. You and Jake are truthful, and this is dreadful for us all."

"Yas, Miss Ev'lyn, we ain't lyin' none. Gawd help us!"

"Is that your hat lying there, Sam?"

"No'm, lan' no, I ain't neber had nothin' but a straw hat! Dat's a sombr'o. Some ol' ting 'long ter Manuel. Mammy make him sweep cellar tudder day, an' he jis r'ar. Mammy say hits de

gipny blood in him, dat's what riled up when he tech a broom,—natchully hate it so."

"Tut, tut, Sam, that's gossip."

The shapeless sombrero, ragged and discolored, might have been lying there for years by the thick dust-laden cobwebs that clung to it as the coroner examined it for evidence, then threw it aside. The knotted stick was known to the servants as one in common use to prop doors and windows.

Another field of evidence seemed to obtrude itself on the general consciousness. Through a wide open door not three feet from Richard Hale's dead body, the interior of Louis Brantome's work room offered subtle suggestions that would not be ignored. Not one who glanced at the table with its litter of trays, films, lenses and slides, but started guiltily at the stab of memory recalling Louis Brantome's insane dislike of Richard Hale, his guardian's son. The suspicion was alarming, unkind, absurd; but it was there.

When Edward Hale arrived there was evident purpose in his guarded questionings as to late manifestations of Louis's animosity; and Hugh Wainright's legal mind saw the forging of fetters.

The suspected youth was in a pitiable state, whether from guilt, remorse, or fright. Shaking as with ague, he offered no word of condolence to his guardian but resigned himself to the ministrations of Mr. Alex Pringle and his wife Caroline, the kindly couple having invited him to ac-

company them home at the break-up of the house party. He was to remain there indefinitely.

Major Carewe did not arrive at The Desert Rose until the day following the removal of the remains of his young friend and guest to the desolate house in Esmeraldo.

Tired and worn though he was, the gallant old man set forth on a visit to Edward Hale to offer what of condolence staunch friendship might.

Hugh Wainright had remained at the ranch, seeming to have advanced years in acquaintance during the terrible twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XV.

The four sat in the library, the Major, bent and shrunken, his face set in lines of tragic grief, Evelyn on a low seat beside his arm chair, her composure fallen like a mask from a personality of suffering, intense to the point of agony; Alice pallid and wan, her dark eyes wild with hysterical weeping, gazing from the depths of a sofa, Hugh Wainright directly opposite his host in an attitude of respectful attention.

The lawyer's mind was acutely strained on the situation in hand. He felt a desire to upheave and cast out the impudent rocks that obstruct the current of an orderly world. Here were placid lives of youth and age, caught in crime's maelstrom somehow, and brutally battered and scarred.

Major Carewe's voice sounded old, old as he began a courteous recognition of the young man's efficiency.

"At my age, sir, we lean on the arm of youth and rejoice in the steadiness of its support. Evie and Alice, my dear, we, as a family, can never hope to repay Mr. Wainright for his presence of mind and noble tact in dealing with this crisis of misfortune."

"I am highly repaid, Major Carewe, with your confidence and the hope of its continuance, in any capacity."

"You are advisory counsel, and we rely on your advice in regard to procedure in the legal aspect of the case. Undoubtedly we must submit to an investigation of the premises."

"Yes, sir. Do not allow anything disturbed in either apartment of the basement, wine cellar, work room or the passage-way between them. Mr. Hale will probably have Louis arrested the day after the funeral. He is guarded now, I understand by some of Richard's close friends. Mr. Pringle says he is really too ill to leave his room. I was sorry to notify Mr. Hale that I could not serve him personally any longer. Owing to my regard for both Louis and Richard an unbiased opinion would be impossible."

"Do *you* believe Richard Hale was *murdered?*" This from Alice, sitting upright, wide-eyed, beseeching.

"What other theory is tenable?"

"That of accidental death. He must have gone down there to see Louis, who was really walking about the grounds somewhere. He had left the arbor but a few minutes before. Richard would be walking about in the basement waiting, and very likely to stumble over something and fall in that dark place. Probably that very stick tripped him and he fell, striking his head against the wall. Oh, don't say he was *murdered!*"

"Let us hope that time will prove he was not," said the Major gently.

"Allie," said Evelyn, rising, "do you care to go

with me to talk a little with the servants. I promised to see them in the housekeeper's room. They are all *so* frightened. No danger of them going to the basement. I had to fetch poor Sam's broom, dropped in fright."

When the young ladies had withdrawn the Major's pent-up thought gave an unwonted animation to his speech.

"This tragic episode has revealed my transplanted self to me. I rejoice in the falling away of some of our traditions—that one, for instance, that invests a man, *a gentleman*, sir, with the livery of vengeance. In Louisiana, Mr. Wainright, *blood calls for blood.* An outrage against hospitality challenges every spark of pride and honor. An autocracy we were in those proud old days, inflated wit hself-esteem, fed on the adulation of cringing blacks and of fawning trader and speculator. Out here, meeting the herdsman on his broncho, the Indian on his pony in the infinite spaces from range to range, the bigness, the freedom of it all shows each his infinitesimal part in the whole scheme. Why play the avenger for a brief moment in the face of eternity? The cycle of the stars will bring all to pass."

"True, true! What effort will be made now for the avenging of blood! Mr. Hale is calmly bent on justice as he sees it and that means proving Louis Brantome guilty of the murder."

"Does Mr. Hale consider the fact that the lad was *entering* the cellar when the negroes made

the discovery. Wouldn't he have fled? I have heard, too, that murderers often lurk near the scene of the murder. Must be nonsense, though."

"Not by any means, sir. There is an irresistible fascination about it sometimes. Mr. Hale thinks that his son was stunned by a blow from Louis and that the latter was creeping back to make sure of his victim. He could have pretended to discover the body if the negroes had not forestalled him. He was in the habit of working down there, and hoped for the general confusion to cover his agitation. This physical collapse is not a pretense. He feels the position in which he is placed acutely. Circumstances are against him. The quarrels between the two young men were matters of common talk. Richard was displeased with the conduct of Louis and there was at least one bitter altercation between them with the prospect of more. Perhaps a last reproach had goaded the poor fellow to madness."

"Ah, yes, these devilish tempers! I could relate you thrilling encounters in the old duelling days. Would to God, sir, we had long ago learned brotherly love."

CHAPTER XVI.

Two days later Evelyn Carewe was riding leisurely along the Forked Canyon road. She had announced her intention of visiting the herb woman and inquiring about the son Manuel, who had been derelict from duty, no one seemed to remember how long.

Evelyn was grateful for the lack of logic that might have linked his disappearance with the presence of the sombrero in the wine cellar and with his general delinquency. Surely no one but herself had heard his vehement "No, no, me not good. Me ver' bad sometimes." He had on one occasion brought Louis specimens for his photographic studies, flowers and insects.

Dismounting at the foot of the slope, she walked up the steep path to the cabin, the bridle-rein over her arm.

As no slim, brown Manuelo came to take the pony, she felt a sureness of conviction that alarmed her. The door was open but no further sign of life visible. Tying Don Juan to a tree she unstrapped a small bundle from the saddle and turned toward the threshold to be met by a startling apparition. Senora Estena herself, but how changed, bent, haggard, stick supported, beckoning a welcome with a wavering arm.

"Senora, you are ill! Why did you not send Manuelo to us for aid?"

"Ah, dear senorita, I know not where he is. Come sit down. You are pale and weary. They told me of the death at the rancho. I ask who, Manuel say nobody know but they search all time, long time for the wicked one. He say he go help, he know canyons and caves. I am sick for days but I tell him go, go, not mind me. Oh, I walk with my stick and I cook lil', the frijoles and meal cakes."

"Poor, poor, woman, you must not stay here. Why not let us take you to the rancho."

"Ah, non, gracias! The Padres will take me in the mission. Sister Ignacia is the head of the convent. I go there with my herbs and they give me absolution and penance. Did the senorita ever see the gran' chapel and all the saints; best of all is Our Lady, all in satin with the jewels—how they glitter?"

"Yes, dear Estena, I looked with wonder on those ornaments, necklaces, bracelets and brooches. Each a sign of penance, I suppose. What heart-breaking stories they could tell of flesh at war with spirit."

"One story the senorita may hear some time, if the padre be willing."

"I trust it is not so terrible as the one we have just lived through."

"Ah, the kill—the murder. Who could hate the gay young Senor Ricardo Hale, with ever the laugh in his blue eye? Yet the dark frowning Senor Brantome hated him, they say, and hate is

so cruel. Sister Ignacia bid me cast it out. Well, Miss Evelina, tell a poor old woman of the sad, sad burial rite? Was there no mass?"

"No, Estena, the Hales are Protestants. A clergyman read the burial service in the parlor of the home where the coffin stood covered with flowers. It was heart-breaking to see the father's grief. He has lost his mainstay, as you would if you lost Manuel."

A spasm of pain passed over the grimly lined face. "I may not keep him long, Sister Ignacia says, but the Mother of Sorrows will give me peace."

"When your boy comes home send him to me. I wish to speak with him and he must not fail me. He *dares* not."

"He be there. I make him understand."

"Here are some sweets for you, chocolates and a bit of linen for drawn work, bright new needles, too."

"Gracias, Senorita Evelina, I am too happy."

"Good-bye, dear friend. We shall see that you are cared for, Grandfather and I."

"Adios, adios! Benedicite."

The package that Evelyn strapped again to her saddle unopened contained Manuel's sombrero. She had intended to confront him with it, in hope of his self-betrayal; but no need now, his culpability was established. She would keep the sombrero now with its cobwebs. Only yesterday her grandfather had commented on the fact that the

coat worn by Louis Brantome on the fatal morning had been seized by the prosecution, on account of the shoulder and sleeve bearing a few threads that looked like spider webs. Manuel would likely come back on hearing of Louis's arrest. He might obey the summons to Desert Rose Ranch.

Next evening Manuel really did appear. The cool spring twilight was falling as Evelyn Carewe drew her dark wrap closely about her and rose fro mher seat in the arbor.

"Manuel, come here."

The last vestige of doubt as to what she should say, vanished at sight of the cringing creature that seemed about to turn and flee. As he came nearer the slinking gait, down-cast eyes, and haggard countenance lent a more peremptory note to her interrogation. "Do you know that you left your sombrero in the wine cellar the morning Senor Richard Hale was found there dead?"

Reeling as if from a blow, the boy managed to collect his shocked senses enough to stammer some sort of a plea, whether of denial or excuse Evelyn did not stop to question.

"Manuel, be seated on this bench and tell me exactly what happened that morning."

"Senorita, lady, for the love of God, don' say it's *me* killed Senor Hale. Mam' Juno make me sweep one day. Maybe I lose the hat. It is in the ol' shed, maybe. That is all."

"Manuel, that is *not* all! Do you wish to see

an innocent man like Mr. Brantome in prison because you will not tell what you know?"

"No, Senorita, no! But the Senor he get free. He gran' gentil hombre."

"Listen to me. You are afraid and this is your chance to get free. I do not know whether you killed the man or not, but you may be arrested on suspicion. This wildness, getting into bad company, lying to your mother ,absent from your work days at a time. Grandfather is at the end of his patience. It's time for you to tell the truth and save yourself. You were working about the arbor that morning but not at the time of the murder. You had disappeared before the body was found by Sam and Jake. I think you were in the wine cellar. Now tell me what you went there for."

"To get the wine bottles. I sell the wine to men in camp in arroyo."

"Then you were stealing our wine—*O Manuel!*"

"They like it so, dose mans and drink, drink—then talk much, all about gold."

"They talk about WHAT?"

"Gold, Senorita, gold they gon' fin' on Major Carewe lan' and buy cheap."

"Why, oh why, poor boy, do you care about their talk?"

The lad's voice was half stifled with sobs.

"Care! I care for, for love Major Carewe, love beautiful lady! Find gol' maybe—make rich!"

Startled, bewildered, dazed with such a reve-

lation, Evelyn felt her pride and scorn melt away into pity and self abasement. The acusing angel was now the sympathizing friend, beside the culprit, her hand reassuringly on his shoulder, her face suffused with tears.

"Oh, poor, erring, faithful heart. Tell me the rest of the story."

"W'en I go for wine bottles, Senor Hale come down steps—call Louis. No answer. Then say 'Come out here, Brantome, I wish spik with you. W'at you hid mongst cobweb in there for? He step right up to door and make mad with me, oh so mad! Stick in my hand it fall. I strike with fist, and run past him. W'en I hide and listen they say '*dead, dead.*' Ah, Senorita, the madness —it is all. I no wan' kill Senor Ricardo! Sometime I think I die!"

The boy was on his knees now, shuddering and sobbing.

"Manuel, no time for crying now! Stand up straight and look at me! You must go and *quickly* to the Alcala Mission. Padre Andrea will care for you and your mother. The sisters will take charge of her while she is ill. As for you, they will give you lodging and work to do. Your life must be religious from now on. Do you understand?"

"Si, senorita, to wear a robe, to shave the head, to work in the field to kneel on the stones for the long praying."

" 'Tis a good life, Manuel, and the way for your

soul to be saved. The rage will die out, the blackness in the heart. Then the white peace of love will come in. Go home to your mother to-night and on to the mission to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Before I explain the presence of these objects, Mr. Wainright, kindly indulge me with an account of this dreadful preliminary hearing. Grandfather was too fatigued for questioning."

"Certainly, Miss Carewe, Louis was so agitated that his statements were confused though hardly contradictory. I think he scarcely understood the questions. Seemed bent on maintaining that he had not seen Richard at all that morning, though they must have been at breakfast together. Denied being in the workshop at all and accounted for the cobwebs on his coat by saying that he spent a few minutes in the arbor. The prosecutor has seized upon the coat as evidence. *Such pettiness!*"

"That gives me a lead. Please look at this as I hold it up to the light."

"It is that old slouch hat, probably Sam's or Jake's."

"No, they never wear this kind. It is the sombrero the coroner threw aside that day of the inquest, you know"

"I remember now. Whose is it?"

"Manuel's, I am sure he was lurking in the wine cellar and struck Richard in blind rage at being discovered. These are cellar cobwebs, thick and brown with dust."

"You are making astounding statements, Miss

Carewe. If we only had Manuel's sworn confession to that! Nothing less would exonerate Louis I fear."

"The intuitions of our sex are usually ridiculed; but I trust women's ideas are not held in contempt by you."

"Assuredly not, Miss Carewe."

"When I understood the purport of the spider webs on Louis Brantome's coat the thought came to me that these might serve as counterpoise. The ownership of the sombrero is not the question nor the hat itself, but the cobwebs. Believing in Louis's innocence I know the webs on his coat must have come from the arbor and of the garden or outdoor variety,quite different from the indoor kind.

"Please look at these microscopic slides with me and observe those labelled 'Garden Spider.' You see they are wheel-shaped, the main threads concentric. Those labelled 'Ground Spider,' 'Indoor Spider' are of a close texture, filmy."

"May I ask where these slides came from?"

"From Louis Brantome's work room in the basement. Wouldn't it be providential if his life could be saved by them?"

"Miraculous, I should say; but we will omit nothing that may help him. Having refused to assist in the prosecution, I shall be glad to offer any testimony I can for the accused."

"Will you tell Louis's attorney about the slides

and have microscopic appliances ready to make tests at the trial."

"Nothing could give me more pleasure. As it happens I know the defendant's lawyer. Justin McReath. A bright fellow at school, he was."

"Does the proof seem conclusive?"

"Allow me to be brutally frank and say *'not at all.'* Nothing but the most specious argument could be based on it. There is the glaring fallacy of undistributed middle; even if you were sure of your major premise."

"Oh, Mr. Wainright, I had hoped to be of some use, though not a scientist."

"A scientist would not dare assert that all garden spiders' webs are volvular and concentric. Granting that even the reasoning would not necessarily follow that a certain web being volvular and concentric was that of a garden spider. Indoor spiders are not debarred from manufacturing that species of web. There is grave apprehension in my mind as to the characteristics of cobwebs."

"Please, Mr. Wainright, do not give it up! Louis is not a murderer; he must be set free!"

"I honor your loyalty to friendship, Miss Carewe. With the faith of good women bestowed upon us, we men ought to conquer the savagery within us. There are fighting proclivities in us all,—and—poor Brantome.

"However, I shall do my best. Justin McReath has an alert mind. Quick to discern fallacies, he

is just as skillful in smothering them on his own side. The judge and jury in this case are not likely to be naturalists; but our chance lies in their wishing to be considered so and therefore more easily impressed."

"I see what you mean, *gulled, deceived.* I hate deception!"

"So do we all; but this is in the interest of justice. Your intuitions assure you of Brantome's innocence."

"I did not say that; but I am sure of it."

"Then, why not employ any evidence available to produce a like conviction in the minds of the jury. The prosecution has adduced spider webs. The pace has been set. Ours the task to out-distance our opponents. This Mr. Blount is not the lawyer I should have chosen for prosecuting attorney, a pompous overbearing man, rather shallow and easily thrown off his guard. It is time I took my leave. You are tired and worn with this."

"Nothing to compare with my cousin, Miss Dauphine is not really able to bear the strain of attending the trial, but I presume we shall all be summoned as witnesses."

"A brutal shame, this dragging women into court; but such is our modern chivalry."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The mountain village of Emeraldo was crowded with the usual motley of "court day." The sight of a criminal known or suspected was common enough but this case was unique. A house party of gentry at Desert Rose Ranch had been the occasion of tragedy, a place where brawls were unheard of. If it had been at Miguel's——

The court-house square was agape with spectators. The dramatis personae had to walk between packed lines of cowboys in buckskin, miners in grimy overalls, flashily arrayed gamblers and tattered saloon loafers.

The judge on the bench was past middle age, bald and portly. There was the usual nondescript jury of ranchmen, lank, hard-faced, keen-eyed; merchants, rotund, double chinned and obsequious; brokers and real estate agents with waxed mustaches and clothes of semi-fashionable cut.

The prisoner entered leaning on the arm of his lawyer; his bowed head and wan, sharp features eliciting pitying remark.

The prosecution purposed to bring out in full relief, the mortal antipathy existing between the defendant and the murdered man. Edward Hale and various employes and servants of his household testified to the frequent manifestations of hatred on the part of Louis Brantome, and his unreasoning outbursts of temper.

Evelyn Carewe and Alice Dauphine scarcely listened to this, so eager were they for the final *coup*.

A general rustling of surprise greeted the prosecutor as he unwrapped a small package and carefully unfolded a garment of some kind.

"Gentlemen of the jury, observe this coat, the one worn by the prisoner at the time Richard Hale was murdered. As I hand it to you each in turn for inspection, you will observe that the left shoulder and sleeve have cobwebs clinging to them. They are mute but eloquent witnesses, gentlemen, when the facts are fully considered.

"Look at the coat and bear in mind that Louis Brantome was in his work room in a basement near a wine cellar festooned with cobwebs."

Justin McReath sprang to his feet. "Your honor, may I offer the objection that Prosecutor Blount is haranguing the jury on the general merits of the case before the evidence is in?"

Though the objection was sustained, there was an air of triumph on the part of the prosecutor.

The counsel for defense alone seemed unmoved by this startling evidence. With the deliberation of composure, he placed a polished wooden case about fifteen inches high by half as many square on the table. From this he took a compound microscope and adjusted it.

Evelyn Carewe, looking across at Louis Brantome, noted on his countenance the first flicker of real interest. A longing to reach the crisis

seized her, and she was glad to hear her name called.

Justin McReath was offering her a man's dilapidated hat for inspection, holding it at arm's length, twirling it on two fingers thrust inside the rent crown.

"Miss Carewe, do you recognize this?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"A sombrero."

"When and under what circumstances have you seen it before to-day?"

"I picked it up after the coroner had thrown it aside in the basement where Richard Hale's body was found, and later handed it to Mr. Wainright."

"Gentleman of the jury, take note that Mr. Wainright handed the sombrero to me."

"Witness, what was your object in offering this piece of evidence?"

"Hearing that cobwebs were to be brought in by the prosecution, I thought those clinging to this old hat might further the interests of justice."

"Thank you, Miss Carewe. That is all."

There was a strange sense of mockery in it all to Evelyn as, sinking back limply into her seat, she watched the progress of the weather stained rag of felt with its fringe of cobwebs along the jury box.

Hugh Wainright was the next witness called

to corroborate the statement in regard to the custody of the sombrero.

McReath's next move thoroughly aroused the audience.

"Gentlemen of the jury, you will have observed that the cobwebs on this hat are of an entirely different texture from those on the coat previously examined."

"Your honor, I ask that you take both hat and coat in your personal charge; and that this honorable body of jurors compare the aforesaid spider-webs."

Prosecutor Blount, fuming and twisting his mustache, thought he saw an opportunity.

"Your honor, I object."

"The objection is not sustained."

Lawyer McReath was calmly assorting some tiny oblongs of glass.

"These microscopic slides are the work of a scientist, gentlemen of the jury. Observe the labels. 'Web of Garden Spider,' 'Web of Indoor Spider,' 'Web of Ground Spider.' Compare and note absolute dissimilarity. Here are photographs of these magnified ten diameters."

Awed at first by the glibness of the demonstration the countenances of the jurymen gradually rose to expectations into the pseudo-erudite squint that somehow dignifies the poorest bluff. The judge was visibly impressed.

A hush fell on the court-room, followed a moment later by a babel of whispering. The prose-

cutor mopping alternately his face, head and neck with a very moist kerchief, trying to mobilize his forces.

Too fearsome of irrevocable commitment, he dared hazard no objection in the face of entomological lore. The powers of natural science were bearing down upon him. Hugh Wainright's eye was formidable with technical lore—McReath fairly bristled with it! No doubt this unusual lawyer could name and tame those specimens naturalists kept in silly glass cases! What picayune stuff biology had seemed to him at school! A few fragments of nomenclature had lingered caught in the meshes of memory. "Cicada—Lepidoptra—Arachnae—"

The lawyer for the defense was readjusting the microscope.

"Now, in your presence, gentlemen, I shall proceed to take a fragment of the web from the coat of Louis Brantome, the defendant in this case, also a portion of the web from the hat found in the wine cellar near the spot where Richard Hale's body was murdered."

With the point of a scalpel very dexterously the transfer was made and the two samples of cobwebs spread on black cardboard. In a twinkling these were under the lens and presented to each astounded juror in turn. The novelty of this had its logical effect, *instantaneous mental pursuit of an unexpected clue.*

Henceforth all interest centered in the spider

web test. Nothing else was talked of by the spectators gathered in after adjournment. Justin McReath and Hugh Wainright enjoyed their laugh in seclusion.

Evelyn's conscience sting had become a gnawing pain, offset by the mounting fear of failure in the last resort of justice. The one other dread on her mind was the imminent questioning of the prosecutor. She had undergone it so repeatedly in imagination that the reply came mechanically.

"Miss Carewe, why did you retain that sombrero?"

"In the interest of justice."

"To whom does it belong?"

"To a Mexican boy employed by my grandfather."

"How came it in the cellar?"

"Manuel was at one time required to sweep the basement."

"Did you intend to incriminate this Mexican?"

"No."

On the stand in his own defense the accused gave a coherent account of his whereabouts on the fatal morning. Did not converse with Richard Hale at breakfast. Did not meet him at the arbor although spending a few minutes there. Strolled about the grounds until ready to resume his uncompleted work in the dark room. His first intimation of the crime had come from the negroes whom he met on the basement stairs.

In his plea before the court the prosecutor re-

iterated all evidence showing the hatred of Louis Brantome toward the young man whom he considered an enemy, and their violent quarrels.

"Consider the facts, gentlemen. As this stricken father has stated; his kindly offices as guardian were wholly misconstrued by this perverted youth, whose mind had become poisoned by religious teaching fit for the Dark Ages. Extravagance, fanaticism and impatience of restraint, all bred hatred of his best friend and that best friend's son. It has been proven that the rude youth's incivility to ladies had called forth remonstrances from Richard Hale, a young gentleman well fitted for monitor, and that an altercation took place the evening before the murder.

"Louis Brantome, accused of this crime, had immured himself in the basement with naturalistic studies and amateur photography, using an apartment as a 'dark room.' Richard Hale had no object in going there except to converse with Brantome. He must have had something of importance to say that morning, and please note carefully, *he had declared his intention of reproving Brantome for a breach of courtesy toward the young ladies of the house party.*

"I do not presume to say what took place between this high-spirited young man and the defendant, admittedly possessed of a mortal dislike and a passionate temper, but the result is logical—hasty words, a fatal blow, flight and return.

"Gentlemen, you as men of affairs, keen ob-

servers of human nature, know that there is some mysterious spell cast over a murderer by the scene of his crime. It not only haunts his mind; but draws him bodily. The slayer of Richard Hale had to return. He was creeping back to look upon the face of his victim when the servants met him on the stairs.

"The very coat the defendant wore bears witness to his guilt, by the cobwebs clinging to shoulder and sleeve. The particular species of spider makes no difference. If the webs are those of the garden spider, nothing is proved but the fact that the defendant was excited and rushed heedlessly into some thicket of shrubbery."

The lawyer paused disconcerted by the discredit in the jurors' eyes. They had detected the subterfuge; but there was no retreat possible now, so he went on.

"Logically now, what bearing could an old slouch hat, thrown aside by a servant sweeping the basement have on the case? *None whatever,* as well admit the wine bottles on the cellar shelves."

Mute antagonism on the part of the jury toward this specious refutation and lack of enthusiasm in the spectators sapped the prosecutor's speech of its last element of strength and he barely saved his dignity by a hastily framed conclusion.

Justin McReath's plea was brief. He challenged his opponent to adduce proof any really mur-

derous quarrel or menacing word. Louis Brantome was a pious recluse, trained in pensive and studious habits by learned Padre Francisco. Even admitting an unfriendly disposition toward the gay and merry Richard Hale, there was no proof of any personal violence. Louis Brantome had not been in the basement at Desert Rose ranch when Richard Hale came to seek him. The spider webs on his coat sleeve were not those of the wine cellar. The merest tyro in science could attest that *Richard Hale came to his death either at the hands of an unknown person, or from an accidental fall.*

The charge to the jury laid a strong injunction on the careful weighing of evidence and against the undue emphasis on the sympathetic or emotional aspect of either side of the case.

As the venue filed out under guard, the hopelessness of justice swept over Evelyn Carewe. What a parody it all seemed and who and what was she to withhold her secret knowledge of Manuel's guilt! Yet, poor Manuel, who with heart of human pity could betray such abjectness?

Wickedly rash as the deed had been a noble, chivalrous impulse had launched Manuel on his fatal career. The murder was accidental, but who would believe it so? Nevertheless should the verdict of '*guilty*' be returned, Louis Brantome must be cleared by nothing less than the real culprit's confession. Could she summon power to command that? But after ten hours'

deliberation the foreman announced "Acquitted for lack of evidence."

CHAPTER XIX.

Hugh Wainright brought the news to The Desert Rose. Major Carewe, Alice and Evelyn were gathered in the library, scarcely speaking and then on indifferent topics.

The courier delivered his news, standing, hat in hand, flushed and tremulous. The stern old Major had thrown an arm about the young man's shoulders and was repeating "for lack of evidence—*lack of evidence*—thank God!" Alice, after a burst of hysterical laughter, was crying against the back of the sofa. Evelyn alone was calm as if for conscience sake. She had no right to glory in what seemed jugglery now, an opportunist's clever play upon the stupid vanity of counsel and jury. She had never before felt the cheapness of expedient, the taint of truckling. Hugh Wainright had been accomplice. Would he be co-suppliant."

"How did young Brantome receive the verdict." Major Carewe was interrogating Hugh.

"Apathetically, it seemed to me. A priest attended him, his father confessor, I suppose. They hurried away. I understand that Louis goes today to enter the monastery of St. Ignace, one of the Alcala institutions. The padres have broken his last reserve."

"Ah—that indeed; it is well. He will find peace

there and eventually the lifting of the shadow that has fallen on his young life."

"Grandfather, should we not pay him at least one visit in his retreat?"

"Why, Evelyn, dear child, it might be arranged. I know Father Francisco and he is ever ready to oblige his friends. He would not refuse us admittance. Anyway we shall venture. How would you like the drive, Alice, in the double buckboard? The ponies are equal to that bit of mountain slope.

CHAPTER XX.

High above the turmoil of the lowlands, rested the clustered buildings of the Old Mission of Alcala on its shelving plateau against the dark mountain pines. White gleamed the chapel facade through its mantle of vines and on either side convent and monastery were visible above the bushy-headed olives green in full sunlight of the summer day, gray in its caressing breeze. High-spired against the blue sky the glittering cross spread arms of benediction over all.

The monks toiling in the fields did not pause for more than a passing glance at the equipage with its handsome team and negro driver; although the sight might be the only such of a lifetime. The barred gate in the arched entrance looked forbidding, and it required the ringing of a bell to elicit a response. The keeper appeared, bent and shrill of voice; the gate was slid back a trifle and Major Carewe permitted to ask to see Father Francisco.

The gate was again closed to be re-opened ten minutes later with an invitation to enter the court. It was an austere place with its flagged pavement and rude benches. The ladies seated themselves while Major Carewe walked up and down.

Presently a tall dignified man in a rusty cossack appeared with pleased recognition.

"My dear Senor Carewe, I am glad. The senoritas? Are they relatives?"

"My granddaughter, Miss Evelyn Carewe, and our guest, Miss Alice Dauphine."

"May we see Louis Brantome?"

"Yes you, Major Carewe, but not the young ladies—our rules of Holy Church."

"Very well, thank you, Father Francisco. May I escort them to the convent and seek admittance there?"

"You may. I will escort you all."

At the convent gates Father Francisco's voice commanded ingress and singling out a guide from the nuns walking in pairs about the court bade her conduct the visitors to the Mother Superior's room.

Through the narrow empty corridors their footsteps echoed until Alice clung to her cousin in nervous terror.

Mother Angelique was imposing in her corpulence, breadth of skirt and length of veil. She hesitated over the cards handed her by the little novice attendant who stood by her chair.

"Permit me to explain why I desire to visit the hospital," said Evelyn. There is a sick woman who must be there. I know her well. Senora Estena is her name with us."

"Ah, I will call Sister Veronica from the dispensary. Run Mariquita!"

When Sister Veronica appeared there was no longer any doubt of the visitors being admitted

to the hospital. Her brown wrinkles went all in curves.

Half reclining against the rude headboard of her bed, Senora Estena's angular form looked shrunken with illness. Her face was pitifully withered and sharp. Like jet gleamed her sunken eyes, staring, gazing into nothingness. The gnarled hand outside the coarse coverlet twitched convulsively at the touch of Evelyn's cool soft fingers.

"Do you know me, dear old Estena? It's Evelyn, and Alice is here, too. We have come to see you."

Electrified at the voice and touch, the listless frame started bolt upright. Leaning forward Estena searched with glowing orbs the faces of these two miraculous visitants.

"My senoritas—stay! Not go like others. Angels go, oh, so queeck—devils stay—but not so many now since I do not long for it back—my sin offering."

"Dear Estena, we do not know" began Alice.

"I tell it much, much, and nobody knows" moaned Estena. "I mean the *pin*, the *jewel*. It is on her robe—the Holy Virgin. She has it now. Sister Beatrice can tell."

A nurse standing near interposed gently, "She refers to a scarf pin—a diamond, which she offered to the Virgin Mary. It is on the robe of the image in the chapel."

"I remember she told me something about it once but not the full story."

"How did she happen to possess a pin of such value," asked Alice.

"Oh, in some impious way, and it had caused her years of remorse and suffering."

Evelyn had seated herself on a stool at the bedside and holding the knotted hand was gently caressing the bony arm in its coarse cotton sleeve.

"Dear senora, are you happy now? Does Manuel come often to see you?"

"Ah, senorita, the dear boy. He was here yesterday and told me of the good life. Some day he be good man like the brothers and the padres. Oh, 'tis good to see the robe and the shaven head. This is a holy place, not like the canon nor Louisiana.

"Estena, please tell me the story—your story. Did you ever live in Louisiana?"

"Yes, my senorita, if you not hate me I will tell. We were gipsies, Romany folk going from land to land. We would camp on the islands among the bayous under the great cypresses with their hanging moss. Forgive me; it was wicked but I did not know. They liked to come—gay young people from the plantation to have their fortune told. Older folk were too sad, 'Because of the war,' they said.

"Ah, my senorita, do not hate me because I saw your father and loved him."

"*My father!*" Evelyn could not stifle her cry

of shocked amazement at this revelation. Alice frightened, turned to Sister Beatrice. "She is delirious, isn't she? Doesn't know what she is saying?"

"Perhaps," assented the sister, "her mind wanders."

"When he came to learn the dance 'twas I who went wild. I taught him the scarf dance. He was *mine* I thought. We were happy—then the black shame when I found the pretty jewel. The good saints know I did not steal it. The fringe caught it and I cursed the old woman who bade me keep it, but I could not find Senor Felipe, I was afraid of the old Senor Carewe. He ordered me from the place. I was afraid.

"More and more I hated the gipsies who made me sin. Always I try to run way. At last I did go to the West—far West. Then I hide in convent. The hermanas, good sisters, take me in. Then I wan' be free again, run way again—this time with Juan—handsome wicked Juan who follow me. In the canon I build the hut—there Manuel was born after Juan left me. Then—then—you know the herb woman senorita. But always I have the diamond of Senor Felipe Carewe. He had looked on me with eyes of kindness and he must think I steal like all gipsy women. Ah, lady, you know it not, the fiery eating canker of shame. I never tell Juan but when I go to the mission with herbs they talk to me, the priests, and I confess. When I pin the jewel on Our Blessed

Lady's robe a healing dew fell on my heart. I could sleep now and dream of peace. Only for Manuel! Saints in heaven, he must not steal. He wanted gold—gold for Senorita Carewe. It was a madness. 'The senorita should have wealth —I find gold' he would moan in his sleep—poor boy."

The quavering voice was but a murmur now; the sunken eyes were closed. Evelyn sprang up and assisted the nurse in arranging the pillows of the poor sufferer.

"Poor, poor woman—what a sad story," faltered tearful Alice.

"We must go now," said Evelyn. "This has been a terrible strain on her. Good-bye, Dear Estena," and the girl patted the withered cheek; "you have loved and suffered. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXI.

Major Carewe was waiting in the cloister with news of Louis Brantome. He had not seemed especially glad to receive a visit from the world he had lately known.

"Already a confirmed recluse, always one by temperament. All he needed was a few of the world's buffets to make him turn his back on it. He will find peace, a very good substitute for happiness."

Alice scarcely spoke on the way homeward. Her affection for the strange Sir Knight of the Rueful Countenance had not been an infatuation; but the tragedy of his life had power to overshadow her whole future. The world had seemed a bright gay place heretofore. Young men had been amusing, if not deeply interesting. Louis Brantome bore the distinction of disdain. Under such a reserve must be genius to feed a woman's pride of life, sometime—now nevermore!

Evelyn was too utterly overwhelmed with the story of the gipsy girl's penance to observe her cousin's utter blankness at the Major's words.

That night at bedtime, missing Alice's accustomed presence she went to seek her in her own room. "I will not disturb her, poor dear, if she is asleep," thought the visitor peering through the half open door.

No, Alice was not asleep. The moonlight flood-

ing the room showed her dark eyes wide with pain, like wells of sorrow in the white face framed in dark hair.

"Come in, Evie, I was longing for you," and the quivering voice ended in a sob.

"Tell me what it is that keeps you awake, Allie. Here I am, right by you on the bed."

"I think I'll go home to New Orleans. You'll get tired of my dreariness and moping and I can't ever be gay again, Evie—dear, not ever in this world!"

"I know, darling. It's this awful, *awful* thing that has happened, and poor silly Louis going to be a monk or priest, perhaps."

"You must have cared Allie; but he was of that recluse nature. Pardon my harshness, dear, but he was not fitted for happiness, not even for a normal existence. That Catholic teaching has somehow brought out all his antagonism toward the social system.

"You know how I should love to keep you, dearie; but if you think a change would be beneficial I shall not be selfish about it. I'll bear the loneliness as best I can. When you come again we shall have better times. Good-night."

In the bustle and excitement of packing and making Alice ready for her journey, Evelyn found surcease from the morbidity of thought that constantly assailed her. Once the ripple had subsided, the calm would be deadly. The secret of Manuel's guilt might become intolerable, yet

why should it be disclosed? Louis Brantome had passed beyond the power of good or ill report. Manuel was not a wilful murderer. Love and loyalty had struck out the spark that had flamed into fires of the nether hell. Poor mortals all! Snaring those we would set free, blighting where we would bless.

Worst of all she had somehow encouraged Richard Hale, might have loved him but for Hugh Wainright. Yet how could she be sure of a real regard on his part.

Were they not joint conspirators—futile schemers?

CHAPTER XXII.

"I am glad to find you in the arbor, Miss Carewe, I called to see Major Carewe on important business—a vital subject, but finding him absent must inflict my presence on you. What a charming place, those magnificent roses forming a fitting background for a fair lady. May I sit beside you?"

For answer a work-basket piled with embroidery material was graciously moved.

"The gallant Mr. Wainright! Lawyers know the arts of persuasion."

"The badge of our profession has many a less worthy emblazonment I fear. Let me plunge headlong into my contrite confession and own up that I was never aware of the bleak barrenness of victory before. You know to what I refer—all that useless chicanery. And to think it went down with spectators, judge and jury."

"That is the burden of my thought—how foolish it all was. A wave of humiliation sweeps over me at the recollection of my impertinence in attempting to direct the arm of justice."

"We were supposed to read Emerson at school. He says something about the Power above meting out the due of each unmindful of our puny efforts.

"His judgments e'er fulfilled will be
In daylight or in dark
His thunderbolts have eyes to see
And hasten to their mark."

"And yet were I back to the hour when the significance of the cobwebs on the old sombrero dawned on me, could I forbear, could I——"

"We are children, Evelyn, grasping at baubles; but not childish enough to hold them for pure metal of truth."

"Was Mr. Hale in any way suspicious of the true murderer of his son?"

"No, and it is better so. Suspicion is unjust, vengeful, cruel."

"I trust the guilty one may find peace after self-torturing of remorse and in penitence and prayer achieve salvation. Perhaps he may not be amenable to the power of wealth but to the power of love."

"The power of love! I have come to realize what it is. For no one else but you, Evelyn, would I have perpetrated such a bluff—taken such a professional risk. I came to-day to ask your grandfather's permission to pay court to you in the manner of a southern gallant of his day; but that seems stilted out here in California.

"I wish to carry you off to my cave, primitive man fashion."

"And I wish to resist; but shall probably arrive at the cave, primitive woman fashion."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"You haven't told me how soon you wish to be married, Evelyn. I heard something about a Christmas or Christmas Eve wedding."

"I do not know grandfather; the exact date has not been set. Hugh suggested Christmas; but out of consideration for Alice we ought to wait until spring when she can be with us again—perhaps. What is your preference?"

"A very early date; but there is much to be done that my little girl may have a proper "setting out" as we southerners phrase it. I expected to remodel and refurnish this rude dwelling into something more befitting my Evelyn, ere her wedding."

"Oh, you *dear, doting grandfather.* This, my home, Desert Rose is the dearest spot to me, the most fit."

"There spoke my loyal, loving, little girl, and she must hear unpleasant news—tidings of more financial difficulties."

"Which I shall not mind in the least. What do I care for money or anything it can buy?" The girl had sprung from her seat beside Major Carewe's desk, and was bending over his bowed head encircling his drooping shoulders with caressing arms.

"Ah that is the speech of youth and hope.

Thank God for such care-free spirits; but listen to what has happened.

Drawing her low chair very close the girl with clasped hands resting on the old man's knee, looked up with pitying wonder into his sadly lined face.

"This letter informs me that a loan of capital—invested money, that is—money invested in Desert Rose Ranch, must be repaid at once. The money was borrowed years ago when I was in straits for irrigation rights that enabled me to reclaim enough acreage to make ranching profitable. It is demanded now."

"Why, grandfather! whose money was it?"

"Louis Brantome's inheritance. As might be surmised, those priests, father confessors of his, lay claim to his fortune. Mr. Hale writes me enclosing Father Francisco's demand for immediate payment. My only recourse is borrowing. I must negotiate a loan for the bulk of this debt. I have a little ready money; but my profits from year to year have gone for improvements. I am an old man now and despair of ever leaving you a homestead free of incumbrance. We are no worse off for this really. It is the dislike I feel toward the business of dealing with a strange capitalist as my new creditor must be."

"Oh, poor grandfather; to think of your being so annoyed! It all comes from this dreadful thing that has happened—has cast a shadow over us all."

"There, there now, child! don't dignify my petty vaporings like that. I'm only vexed at the prospect of leaving an estate in the clutches of a professional money loaner. It pains me to cloud these happy hours of your engagement with sinister considerations; but I desire that you shall know exactly.

"When I get the business on its new footing I shall prepare a careful statement for Hugh. He must know what an improvident guardian I have been to offer such a meagre dowry. There, there, Evie, don't smother me and I'll bewail the fates no more."

"Are all these papers important?"

"Rather ,they belong to this business. This letter addresses a San Francisco firm."

"Well, let me put every scrap away, each in its proper pigeon hole and then I'll take the letter to Sam who must be soon mounting for the post. Now you are to rest until dinner. We dine late this evening, Hugh could not come at the usual hour. I shall walk awhile."

The blaze of the low autumn sun without seemed scorching the very leaves from the trees bordering the rivulet, trickling along the edge of the lawn. Finding the heat intolerable, Evelyn sought the long endeared retreat of her arbor where the massed foliage defied the sun, jungle fashion.

The cool solitude was balm to the girl's mind harassed amid her happiness with th esight of

Majo rCarewe's distress. Half reclining on the rustic seat she made a picture of pensiveness; her bright hair against the leafy wall, her eyes soft with unshed tears, wide with the intensity of thought for the grief bowed old man. A vague dread rose within her consciousness. Alice had hoped for happiness. Was this the first bitter drop that should taint the whole cup? Was there some baleful ire in this alien haunted West? No, she must calm her misgivings ere time for Hugh to arrive. It was growing late, shadows were creeping toward her from the swaying vines at the entrance. What was that sound? Not the mind—more like a human being gasping for breath. She must go at once and dismiss these tremors.

Ere she had taken the second step something confronted her in the doorway—a lank figure half wrapped in a cloak-like garment, hatless, with shaggy locks and gleaming eyes; a form that swayed and fell as from exhaustion, then crept toward her gasping out, "Senorita, for the love of madre dios, stay a moment."

"Manuel." Evelyn's involuntary shriek of fright had been instantly stifled and she could command dignity now.

"Manuel, have you run away from the Mission?"

"Si, senorita, my mother she die an' my heart sicken for the canyon. I go an' fin' bad men

there an' maybe they dig *gold*, gold on Senor Carewe land."

"Never mind about that. What ails you?"

"Why I hold this robe so tight me? We have a fight and they shoot the carabine, you know."

So here was a new horror, the youth was hurt, perhaps dying. If there was only a way to spare her grandfather.

"Poor boy, I must run for help. We will take care of you. Why Manuel, what do you mean? Let go of my dress! Are you crazy? Let me go I tell you. I must get help."

"No help but one, Senorita, the grovelling creature had scrambled half to his feet and now sank on one knee, holding the robe across his breast with one hand while the other clutched frantically at the lace flounces of Evelyn's skirt.

"The senorita can help, can cure the soul, the mind. Poor Manuel is crazy for love of the grand lady. La madre she say the senorita's father love da gipsy. If you hate Manuel kill him. He die when you hate him."

The sound of footsteps and voices outside broke the spell of terror for Evelyn and eluding the madman's grasp with a swift bound she collided with Major Carewe in the narrow doorway bowling him over but for the steadying arm of the young man close behind him.

"Why, Evelyn, what is this? Beg pardon, Mr. Wainright."

"Grandfather, grandfather, it's nothing! only he frightened me—Manuel in there."

"*Manuel?* that Mexican! What outrage is this? Take Evie to the house, Hugh, and I'll call Jake and Sam."

"Listen, grandfather, please listen! He's in there and he's hurt—wounded. Has run away from the Mission. Don't be harsh with him. I'm not badly frightened."

"Well, child, you look it anyway. But we shall certainly not punish a wounded man. Now go on in with Hugh."

Dinner was indeed late that evening, but carried off with fair dignity. Evelyn was glad to give no further account of Manuel who was being tended by the kindly servants, all curiously hypothetical in solving the mystery of his wound, a mere bullet graze of the chest.

Run away from the Mission had he? Of course all had foreseen that. Been in a fight? Nobody was surprised at that, neither at his seeking sanctuary at Desert Rose. Miss Evelyn was ever so kind to overlook that bad fright he gave her and Major Carewe—wasn't he the grand gentleman to send for the best surgeon in Emeraldo! Oh, of course the scamp would get well!

But Mantuel would *not* get well. Dr. Pratt was gravely silent at first, even puzzled. On the occasion of his second visit he pronounced the case hopeless. Incredulous looks from the household invited explanation which was conclusive.

"The lad's fevered condition, my dear Major Carewe, is not owing to that flesh wound in his chest. Its origin is in mental strain, fatigue, and lowered vitality. In his delirium he raves of the hated restraints of the cloister, of his mother's death, of spying about prospector's camps, the fighting and all such outlawry. I administered an opiate to stop his babble. In the morning he will be somewhat rational, perhaps, but extremely weak. It will be his last day."

"Oh, Doctor Pratt," cried Evelyn. "It seems so cruel! Can you not save the poor fellow?"

"No, no; and 'tis better for the lad. His mind is unhinged, and the lunacy of a dangerous character; all the more so because of so-called 'lucid intervals.' It would be a case for the authorities, as common safety requires the incarceration of even the slightly demented."

"To be sure, to be sure;" assented Major Carewe. "My little Evie has a warm heart for the outcast Mexicans. The herb woman and her son Manuel were favored. The woman *did* have an appealing way. From a strolling gipsy she became a saintly mission convert."

"Yes, I was attached to Senora Estena, and my childish heart rejoiced when you befriended her wayward son. I was proud of your goodness."

"A generous noble deed," warmly commended Dr. Pratt.

"One most ignoble of result" protested the Major. "Tut, tut, now!"

"Granting that the boy did turn outlaw; yet it is to your credit that he sought gentlefolk in his last extremity and dies like a Christian under a hospitable roof."

"I'm so glad he reached us," murmured Evelyn tearfully. "His last hours shall be made peaceful."

Early next morning it became generally known at Desert Rose that Manuel could not survive the day.

On his white bed in the center of the white walled chamber he lay, motionless but for the quiverings of labored breath.

Evelyn Carewe wan with pity, gently took the palm leaf fan from Juno's hand.

"Go, please, Mammy and get some rest. No, *no*, do not send Manda or Sally. I will stay awhile."

"Laws a mussy, Miss Ev'lyn, ain't you skeered?"

"Not in the least. I will ring when I need anyone."

As the door closed softly the dying man stirred and his eyes opened wide.

Evelyn bent over him. "Do you know me, Manuel?"

A ghastly smile of recognition answered her. With all a woman's tenderness she stroked his forehead, shuddering inwardly at the frightful ravage of fever.

She had hoped that he would not try to speak;

but the tremulous lips were already striving to frame the word.

"Senorita."

"Yes, Manuel."

"Senorita, you come. The saints hear me. You come get gold. In my robe—there."

The hoarse whisper was loud and distinct ,and the gleaming sunken eyes fixed on a tattered monk's habit hanging on the wall.

"For the senorita!—gold—inside!——"

The agonized pleadings would not be silenced otherwise and the frenzied girl tore the garment from its peg. Her quick fingers detected an inner breast pocket and abstracted the contents—a tiny roll of buckskin tied with a thong.

"Open—open!" commanded the whisper.

Unrolled, the strip of leather revealed a coating of gleaming dust.

"Si, Senorita! *yours,* YOURS. Manuel wild, wild—say—no love— no gold. Now Manuel die; Senorita live—rich—gold."

The next instant loud peals of the bell brought a crowd of servitors to find the death struggle all but over; and Evelyn Carewe crept to her own room shaken with heart sobs of genuine grief.

Two days later, Evelyn laid the leather roll on her grandfather's desk and bade him examine the contents. When the explanation of Manuel's conduct had been given in broken words by the girl who had unwittingly been the lode star of his

errant existence, both sat silent awhile, awed by the sense of tragedy.

Finally the major, in subdued tones, "Evie I am thus rebuked for my lack of enterprise. No prospecting has ever been attempted by me. Now a stranger discovers your fortune for you."

"Then the stone hut where Estena lived really is on Desert Rose territory."

"Yes, my latest survey line runs along the farther side of Forked Canyon. I must send some trustworthy person and an assayer to examine this vein."

"Report of campers leaving the canyon reached me yesterday. I have never molested the dwellers in tents, amid those barren rocks—seems inhospitable; but poor Manuel must have alarmed them. Ah, here comes Hugh, perhaps he will verify our 'find' for us."

But when half an hour had been spent in explaining the strange turn of fortune to Hugh Wainright, his fiancee still protested against claiming the gold. The couple walked back and forth on the piazza, the girl highly wrought in dissent.

"Hugh, I cannot *ever* touch that gold. I do not want any mine. The poor boy *lost his life* for those few grains of gold. It is too precious for me."

"I understand how one of your refined sensibilities must feel, yet we cannot disregard Major Carewe's request."

"Grandfather's *requests* are *commands;* and too, this may free him of indebtedness, unless the vein proves worthless."

"There is a chance of disappointment, but if the discovery proves true, *a real gold mine;* may I swing my hat, mountain ranger fashion, riding in to-morrow evening? 'Twould never be the way of a chevalier of Louisiana in old plantation days; but my sweet southern flower has borne well the ordeal of her transplanting."

Just at sunset next evening, Major Carewe in his arm chair on the piazza descried the approach of a horseman in full gallop across the mesa, and called the attention of the girl standing straight and tall beside him.

"I see," said she, "and he is *swinging his hat.*"